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TALES FROM BECTIVE BRIDGE



TALES FROM BECTIVE BRIDGE



MARY LAVIN

Preface by

LORD DUNSANY



READERS UNION

MICHAEL JOSEPH

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A Preface



I have had the good fortune to have many stories and poems sent to me by young writers. In nearly all of them the ardours of youth showed flashes, some rarely, some frequently, but in only two of them have I felt sure that I was reading the work of a master. And these two great writers, as I believe them to be, both wrote to me by a strange coincidence from the same bank of the same river, the left bank of the Boyne. One of these writers was Francis Ledwidge, who unhappily lived too short a time to do much more than show promise of the great bulk of fine work of which I am sure he was capable. But, although he has not a very large number of readers, that early promise of his has received recognition by lovers of poetry, both in his own country and at the ends of the earth.

I have now the pleasure of introducing another fine writer, Miss Mary Lavin; very different from Francis Ledwidge, except for the same piercing eye, which to Ledwidge revealed the minutest details of Irish hedgerows, with all their flowers and birds, and to Mary Lavin the hearts of women and children and men. Indeed, when I once asked her to meet one or two writers in my house, and when one of them, a professor from Trinity College, afterwards read the only story of hers that as yet had been printed, he realized rather uncomfortably that those searching eyes must have gone right through him; it was rather as though he had come with his pockets full of all sorts of collected objects, and perhaps had a broken rib long ago mended, and had afterwards learned that he had been all the while exposed to the action of X-rays.

I am afraid that there is a tendency among writers, when at last any recognition comes to them, rather to regret the

arrival of any new competitor, or at least to expect that that competitor shall spend as many weary years on the road to recognition as they were forced to spend themselves. But for my part it is not the writing that so much attracts me, nor the recognition that it may be given at last, but the intrinsic thing, the glittering idea that the writing may make visible. If this glittering idea is seen by myself, I have had all the hard work of hewing it out of the cliffs of dreamland; but if somebody else will lay an idea before me, shining from the page of a book, without my having to toil at it, I feel that I, and everybody else, are very lucky to have it shown to us.

When Ledwidge first brought his work to me I gave him a very little advice, which he immediately profited by, as people do not usually profit by advice. The best thing I did for him was to lend him a copy of Keats; and the great speed with which he seemed to absorb it, and slightly to flavour his work with it, gave me some insight into his enormous powers, which were unhappily never developed. But my first impression when Mary Lavin sent me some of her work, an impression that I have never altered, was that I had no advice whatever to give her about literature; so I have only helped her with her punctuation, which was bad, and with her hyphens, about which she shares the complete ignorance that in the fourth decade of the twentieth century appears to afflict nearly everybody who writes. Only in these trivial matters do I feel that I know anything more about writing than Mary Lavin.

I have never had much to do with the classifying of writers, my attitude towards art having always been that of a child to a butterfly rather than that of an entomologist, that is to say, a greater interest in its flashing beauty than in its Latin name; so that others will classify Mary Lavin's work, if it is necessary for it to be classified. To me she seems reminiscent of the Russians more than of any other school of writers and, with the exception of the gigantic Tolstoy, her searching insight into the human heart and vivid appreciation of the beauty of the fields are worthy in my opinion to be mentioned beside their work. Often, as I read one of her tales, I find myself using superlatives, and then wondering if such praise must not necessarily be mistaken, when applied to the work of a young and quite unknown writer. And yet are not such doubts as

these utterly wrong-minded? For if there is no intrinsic thing in any art whatever, irrespective of its date or the name or age of the writer, how then can there be anything in good work at all? How, if we cannot recognize great work when we come across it unexpectedly, have we any right to say that even Shelley or Keats wrote well? Should we not rather say in that case: "I have been told that they wrote well"? I know people who can never tell a beautiful piece of silverwork or furniture until they have first found out the date of it. If it is over a hundred years old they think it is bound to be good, and if it is made in this century they think it is bound to be bad. Often they are right in both cases, but they have no judgment whatever and, though they are quick to find out the date of a Chippendale chair or the hallmark of a piece of old silver, and will praise their beauty immediately after doing so, nevertheless the emotions that should respond to beauty can only be awakened in them by the aid of a catalogue. That is a very sorry state to be in. Let us therefore always praise intrinsic beauty whenever we see it, without concerning ourselves with irrelevancies, such as the age or name of Mary Lavin, or how on earth she came by her astonishing insight.

But read these stories for yourselves, and see if again and again you do not find sentences which, if they had been translated from the Russian, would make you say that they do indeed show us that those writers understood life. I am reluctant to quote, because anything I would quote lies before you in this book, and because there are quotations which I might make from those tales which would seem to prove my point with almost unnecessary violence. But I suggest that a page should be taken at random from "The Green Grave and the Black Grave" and compared with a random page of any novelist of the present century, to see which page evokes the vividest pictures. I am not, by the way, challenging comparison with Kipling, as he was rather a writer of the last century, which saw his greatest work. After all, writing a story is a matter of acquiring the reader's interest, and holding it while you tell the story, and making him see what happened. Words that do not make us see what happened are rather like false bank notes: offer them in exchange for thought and they are rejected by the mind as spurious. Many yards of

such words are often to be met with, but I do not think that one finds Mary Lavin ever wasting a word.

She tells the stories of quite ordinary lives, the stories of people who many might suppose have no story in all their experience; and when she tells these stories there may be some whose ears, attuned to the modern thriller, may suppose that they are not stories at all. The pivot of one of them, for instance, is where a fly thrown out of a cup of tea, "and celebrating his release a little too soon by sitting on a blade of grass rubbing his hands," is killed by a small dog. It may seem too tiny a thing to notice, and the man's life, which turns in another direction from that moment, may seem tiny and unimportant too, to any who may not reflect how hard it is for any of us to say what is important and what is not. Browning speaks of the gnats:

. . . that carry aloft
The sound they have nursed, so sweet and pure,
Out of a myriad noises soft,
Into a tone that can endure
Amid the noise of a July moon,

and many an ear must miss that tone, and many may miss the work of Mary Lavin. The bold plots and the startling events of the modern thriller are to these tales what a great factory is to the works of a gold watch. Those looking for great engines running at full blast might overlook the delicacy of the machinery of such a watch.

Years hence this preface of mine will seem quite unnecessary. It is only the unimportant circumstance that I was born in the last century, and she in this, and that after twenty or thirty years of writing I have a few readers, whereas she at present has none, which accounts for my writing a preface for her instead of asking her to do the same for me. I do not write it because I think there is anything whatever that I can teach her about literature. I merely stand, as it were, at the portals of this book to point within to what you may find for yourselves, and to recommend you to look for it.

DUNSANY

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Lilacs



“**T**hat dunghill isn’t doing anybody any harm and it’s not going out of where it is as long as I’m in this house!” said Phelim Molloy.

“But if it could only be put somewhere else,” said his wife Ros, “and not right under the window of the room where we eat our bit of food!”

“Didn’t you tell me, yourself, a minute ago, you could smell it from the other end of the town? If that’s the case I don’t see what’s going to be the good in moving it from one side of the yard to the other.”

“What I don’t see,” said his daughter Kate, “is the need for us dealing in dung at all.”

“There you are!” said Phelim. “There you are! I knew all along that was what you had in the back of your mind; both of you, and the one inside too!”—he beckoned backwards with his head towards the door behind him. “You wanted to be rid of it altogether, not just to shift it from one place to another. Why on earth can’t women speak out what they mean? That’s a thing always puzzles me.”

“Leave Stacy out of it, Phelim,” said Ros; “Stacy has one of her headaches.”

“And what gave it to her I’d like to know?” said Phelim. “I’m supposed to think it was the smell of the dung gave it to her, but I know more than to be taken in by women’s nonsensical notions.”

“Don’t talk so loud, Phelim,” said Ros; “she might be asleep.”

“It’s a great wonder any of you can sleep a wink at all any

night with the smell of that poor harmless heap of dung, out there, that's bringing in good money week after week."

He turned to his daughter.

"It paid for your education at a fine boarding school."

He turned to Ros.

"And it paid for Stacy's notions about the violin and the piano, both of which is rotting within there in the room; and not a squeak of a tune ever I heard out of the one or other of them since the day they came into the house!"

"He won't give in," said Ros to her daughter. "We may as well keep our breath."

"You may as well," said Phelim. "That's a true thing anyway." He went over to the yard door. When he opened the door the faint odour of stale manure that hung already about the kitchen was thickened by a hot odour of new manure from the yard. Kate followed her father to the door and banged it shut after him.

As the steel taps on Phelim's shoes rang on the cobbles the two women stood at the window looking out at him. He took up a big yard-brush made of twigs tied to a stick with leather thongs, and he started to brush up dry clots of manure that had fallen from the carts as they travelled from the gate to the dung trough. The dung trough itself was filled to the top, and moisture from the manure was running in yellow streaks down the sides. The manure was brown and it was stuck all over with bright stripes of yellow straw.

"You'll have to keep at him, Mother," said Kate.

"There's not much use," said Ros.

"Something will have to be done. That's all about it!" said Kate. "Only last night at the concert in the Town Hall, just after the lights went down, I heard the new people, that took the bakehouse across the street, telling someone that they couldn't open a window since they came to the town with the terrible smell that was coming from somewhere; I could have died with shame, Mother. I didn't hear what answer they got, but when the lights went up for the interval I saw they were sitting beside Mamie Murtagh, and you know what that one would be likely to say! My whole pleasure in the evening was spoiled, I can assure you."

"You take things too much to heart, Kate," said Ros.

"There's Stacy inside there, and if it wasn't for the smell of it I don't believe she'd mind us having it at all. She says to me sometimes, 'Wouldn't it be lovely, Mother, if there was a smell of lilacs every time we opened the door?' "

"Stacy makes me tired," said Kate, "with her talk about lilacs and lilacs! What does she ever do to try and improve things?"

"She's very timid," said Ros.

"That's all the more reason," said Kate, "my father would listen to her if she'd only speak to him."

"Stacy would never have the heart to cross anyone."

"Stacy's a fool."

"It's the smell that gives her the headaches all the same," said Ros. "Ever since she came home from boarding school she's been getting her headaches every Wednesday regular the very minute the first cartload comes in across the yard."

"Isn't that what I'm saying!" said Kate impatiently, taking down a brown raincoat from a peg behind the door. "I'm going out for a walk and I won't be back till that smell has died down a bit. You can tell him that too, if he's looking for me."

When Kate went out Ros took down a copper tea-caddy from the dresser and threw a few grains of tea into a brown earthen teapot. Then she poured a long stream of boiling water into the teapot from the great sooty kettle that hung over the flames. She poured out a cup of the tea and put sugar and milk in it, and a spoon. She didn't bother with a saucer, and she took the cup over to the window and set it on the sill to cool while she watched Phelim sweeping in the yard.

In her heart there seemed to be a dark clot of malignance towards him because of the way he thwarted them over the dunghill. But as she looked out at him he put his hand to his back every once in a while, and Ros felt the black clots thinning away. Before the tea was cool enough to swallow, her blood was running bright and free in her veins again and she was thinking of the days when he used to call her by the old name.

She couldn't rightly remember when it was she first started calling herself Ros, or whether it was Phelim started it. Or

it might have been someone outside the family altogether. But it was a good name no matter where it came from, a very suitable name for an old woman. It would be only foolishness to go on calling her Rose after she was faded and all dried up. She looked at her hands. They were thin as claws. She went over to the yard door.

"There's tea in the teapot, Phelim," she called out, and she left the door open. She went into the room where the two girls slept.

"Will I take you in a nice cup of nice hot tea, Stacy?" she said, leaning over the big bed.

"Is it settled?" said Stacy, sitting up.

"No," said Ros, pulling across the curtain, "it's to stay where it is."

"I hope he isn't upset?" said Stacy.

"No. He's sweeping the yard," said Ros, "and there's a hot cup of tea in the teapot for him if he likes to take it. You're a good girl, Stacy. How's your poor head?"

"I wouldn't want to upset him," said Stacy. "My head is a bit better. I think I'll get up."

It was, so, to Stacy that Ros turned on the night Phelim was taken bad with the bright pain low in the small of his back. When he died in the early hours of the morning, Ros kept regretting that she had crossed him over the dunghill.

"You have no call to regret anything, Mother," said Stacy. "You were ever and always calling him in out of the yard for cups of tea, morning, noon, and night. I often heard you, days I'd have one of my headaches. You've no call at all for regret."

"Why wouldn't I call him in to a cup of tea on a cold day?" said Ros. "There's no thanks for that. He was the best man that ever lived."

"You did all you could for him, Mother," said Kate, "and there's no need to be moaning and carrying on like that!"

"Let us not say anything," said Ros. "It was you was the one was always at me to talk to him about the dunghill. I wish I never crossed him."

"That was the only thing you ever crossed him over, Mother," said Stacy, "and the smell was really very hard to put up with."

Phelim was laid out in the parlour beyond the kitchen. He was coffined before the night, but the lid was left off the coffin. Ros and the girls stayed up all night in the room. The neighbours stayed in the house, but they sat in the kitchen where they threw sods of turf on the fire when they were needed, and threw handfuls of tea leaves into the teapot now and again, and brought tea in to the Molloyes.

Kate and Stacy sat one each side of their mother and mourned the man they were looking at, lying dead in a sheaf of undertaker linen crimp. They mourned him as they knew him for the last ten years, a heavy man with a red face who was seldom seen out of his big red rubber boots.

Ros mourned the Phelim of the red rubber boots, but she mourned many another Phelim. She mourned him back beyond the time his face used to flush up when he went out in the air. She mourned him the time he never put a hat on when he was going out in the yard. She mourned him when his hair was thick, although it was greying at the sides. She mourned him when he wore a big moustache sticking out stiff on each side. But most of all she mourned him for the early time when he had no hair on his face at all, and when his cheeks were always glossy from being out in the weather. That was the time he had to soap down his curls. That was the time he led her in a piece off the road when they were coming from Mass one Sunday.

"Rose," he said. "I've been thinking. There's a pile of money to be made out of manure. I've been thinking that if I got a cart and collected a bit here and a bit there for a few pence I might be able to sell it in big loads for a lot more than I paid for it."

"Is that so?" she said. She remembered every word they said that day.

"And do you know what I've been thinking too?" he said. "I've been thinking that if I put by what I saved I might have enough by this time next year to take a lease of the little cottage on the Mill Road."

"The one with the church window in the gable end?" she said.

"And the two fine sheds," he said.

"The one with the ivy all down one side?" she said, but she knew well the one he meant.

"That's the very one," said Phelim. "How would you like to live there? With me, I mean."

"Manure has a terrible dirty smell," she said.

"You could plant flowers, maybe."

"I'd have to plant ones with a strong perfume," she said, "rockets and mignonette."

"Any ones you like. You'd have nothing else to do all day."

She remembered well how innocent he was then, for all that he was twenty, and thinking to make a man of himself by taking a wife. His face was white like a girl's, with patches of pink on his cheeks. He was handsome. There were prettier girls by far than her who would have given their eyes to be led in a piece off the road, just for a bit of talk and gassing from Phelim Molloy—let alone a real proposal.

"Will you, Rose?" said Phelim. "There's a pile of money in manure, even if the people around these parts don't set any store by it."

The colour was blotching over his cheeks the way the wind blotched a river. He was nervous. He was putting his foot up on the bar of the gate where they were standing, and the next minute he was taking it down again. She didn't like the smell of manure, then, any more than after, but she liked Phelim.

"It's dirty stuff," she said. And that was her last protest.

"I don't know so much about that," said Phelim. "There's a lot in the way you think about things. Do you know, Rose, sometimes when I'm driving along the road I look down at the dung that's dried into the road and I think to myself that you couldn't ask much prettier than it, the way it flashes by under the horses' feet in pale gold rings." Poor Phelim! There weren't many men would think of things like that.

"All right, so," she said. "I will."

"You will?" said Phelim. "You will?"

The sun spilled down just then and the dog-roses swayed back and forwards in the hedge.

"Kiss me so," he said.

"Not here!" she said. The people were passing on the road and looking down at them. She got as pink as the pink dog-roses.

"Why not?" said Phelim. "If you're going to marry me you must face up to everything. You must do as I say always. You must never be ashamed of anything."

She hung her head, but he put his hand under her chin.

"If you don't kiss me right now, Rose Magarry, I'll have nothing more to do with you."

The way the candles wavered round the corpse was just the way the dog-roses wavered in the wind that day.

Ros shed tears for the little dog-roses. She shed tears for the blushes she had in her cheeks. She shed tears for the soft kissing lips of young Phelim. She shed tears for the sunny splashes of gold dung on the roads. And her tears were quiet and steady, like the crying of the small thin rains in windless weather.

When the cold white morning came at last the neighbours got up and stamped their feet on the flags outside the door. They went home to wash and get themselves ready for the funeral.

When the funeral was over Ros came back to the lonely house between her two daughters. Kate looked well in black. It made her thinner and her high colour looked to advantage. Stacy looked the same as ever. The chairs and tables were all pushed against the wall since they took the coffin out. One or two women stayed behind, and there was hot tea and cold meat. There was a smell of guttered-out candles and a heavy smell of lilies.

Stacy drew in a deep breath.

"Oh, Kate!" she said. "Smell!"

Kate gave her a harsh look.

"Don't remind her," she said, "or she'll be moaning again."

But Ros was already looking out in the yard and the tears were streaming from her eyes again down the easy runnels of her dried and wrinkled face.

"Oh, Phelim," she said. "Why did I ever cross you? Wasn't I the bad old woman to cross you over a little heap of dirt and yellow straw?"

Kate bit her lip.

"Don't take any notice of her," she said to the women. She turned to Stacy. "Take in our hats and coats," she said, "and put a sheet over them." She turned back to the women. "Black is terrible for taking the dust," she said, "and terrible to clean." But all the time she was speaking she was darting glances at Ros.

Ros was moaning louder.

"You're only tormenting yourself, Mother," said Kate. "He was a good man, one of the best, but he was an obstinate man over that dunghill, so you've no call to be upsetting yourself on the head of that!"

"It was out of the dung he made his first few shillings."

"How long ago was that?" said Kate. "And was that any reason for persecuting us all for the last five years with the smell of it coming up under the window, you might say?"

"I think we'll be going, Kate," said the women.

"We're much obliged to you for your kindness in our trouble," said Ros and Kate together.

The women went out quietly.

"Are they gone?" said Stacy, coming out of the inside room, looking out the window at the women going down the road.

"Is it the dunghill you were talking about?" she said. "Because to-morrow is Wednesday!"

"I know that," said Ros.

"The smell isn't so bad to-day, is it?" said Stacy. "Or was it the smell of the flowers drove it out?"

"I wish to goodness you'd look at it in a more serious light, Stacy," said Kate. "It's not alone the smell of it, but the way people look at us when they hear what we deal in."

"It's nothing to be ashamed of," said Ros. "It was honest dealing, and that's more than most in this town can say!"

"What do you know about the way people talk, Mother?" said Kate. "If you were away at boarding school, like Stacy and me, you'd know, then, what it felt like to have to admit your father was making his money out of horse dung."

"I don't see what great call was on you to tell them!" said Ros.

"Listen to that!" said Kate. "It's easily seen you were never at boarding school, Mother."

Stacy had nearly forgotten the boarding school, but she remembered a bit about it then.

"We used to say our father dealt in fertilizer," she said. "But someone looked it up in a dictionary and found out it was only a fancy name for manure."

"Your father would have laughed at that," said Ros.

"It's not so funny at all," said Kate.

"Your father had a wonderful sense of humour," said Ros.

"He was as obstinate as a rock, that's one thing," said Kate.

"When we knew that was the case," said Ros, "why did we cross him? We might have known he wouldn't give in. I wish I never crossed him."

The old woman folded her knotted hands and sat down by the fire in the antique attitude of grieving womankind.

Kate could talk to Stacy when they were in the far corner of the kitchen getting down the cups and saucers from the dresser.

"I never thought she was so old-looking."

"She looked terribly old at the graveside," said Stacy. "Make her take her tea by the fire."

"Will you drink down a nice cup of tea, here by the fire, Mother?" said Stacy, going over to the old woman.

Ros took the cup out of the saucer and put the spoon into it. "Leave that back," she said, pushing away the saucer. She took the cup over to the window sill.

"It only smells bad on hot days," she said, looking out.

"But summer is ahead of us!" said Kate, spinning round sharply and looking at the old woman.

"It is and it isn't," said Ros. "In the January of the year it's as true to say you have put the summer behind you as it is to say it is ahead of you."

"Mother?"

Kate came over and, pushing aside the geranium on the window ledge, she leaned her arm there and stared back into her mother's face.

"Mother," she said. "You're not by any chance thinking of keeping on the dunghill?"

"I'm thinking of one thing only," said Ros. "I'm thinking of him and he young, with no hair on his lip, one day—and the next day, you might say, him lying within on the table and the women washing him for his burial."

"I wish you'd give over tormenting yourself, Mother."

"I'm not tormenting myself at all," said Ros. "I like thinking about him."

"He lived to a good age," said Kate.

"I suppose you'll be saying that about me one of these days,"

said Ros, "and it no time ago I was sitting up straight behind the horse's tail, on my father's buggy, with my white blouse on me and my gold chain dangling and my hair halfway down my back. The road used to be flashing by under the clittering horse-hooves, and the gold dung dried into bright gold rings."

"Stacy," said Kate, that night when they were in bed, "I don't like to see her going back over the old days like she was all day. It's a bad sign. I hope we won't be laying her alongside Father one of these days."

"Oh, Kate," said Stacy, "don't remind me of poor Father. All the time she was talking about crossing him over the dung I was thinking of the hard things I was saying against him the last time my head was splitting and he was leading in the clattering carts over the cobblestones and the dirty smell of the dung rising up on every wind."

"You've no call to torment yourself, Stacy," said Kate.

"That's what you said to Mother."

"It's true what I say, no matter which of you I say it to. There was no need in having the dunghill at all. It was nothing but obstinacy. Start to say your beads now and you'll be asleep before you've said the first decade. And don't be twitching the clothes off me. Move over."

It seemed to Stacy that she had only begun the second decade of her beads, when her closed eyes began to ache with a hard white light shining down on them without pity. She couldn't sleep with that hard light on her eyes. She couldn't open her eyes either, because the light pressed down so weightily on her lids. Perhaps, as Kate had said, it was morning and she had fallen asleep? Stacy forced her lids open. The window square was blinding white with hard venomous daylight. The soft night had gone. There was another day before them, but Father was out in the green churchyard where the long grass was always wet even in yellow sunlight.

Stacy lay cold. Her eyes were wide and scopeless and her feet were touching against the chilled iron rail at the foot of the bed. She looked around the whitewashed room and she looked out of the low window, that was shaped like the window of a church, at the cold crinkled edges of the corrugated sheds.

Stacy longed for it to be summer, though summer was a long way off. She longed for the warm winds to be daffing through the trees and the dallops of grass to be dry enough for flopping down on, right where you were in the middle of a field. And she longed for it to be the time when the tight hard beads of the lilacs looped out into the soft pear shapes of blossom, in other people's gardens.

And then, as soft as the scent of lilac steals through early summer air, the thought came slowly into Stacy's mind that poor dear Father, sleeping in the long grave-grasses, might not mind them having lilacs now where the dunghill used to be. For it seemed already to Stacy that the dunghill was gone now that poor Father himself was gone. She curled up in the blankets and closed her eyes again, and so it was a long time before she knew for certain that there was a sound of knocking on the big yard-gate and a sound of a horse shaking his brass trappings and pawing the cobbles with his forefoot. She raised her head a little off the pillow. There was the sound of a wooden gatewing flapping back against the wall. There was a rattle of horse-hooves and steel-bound cart-wheels going over the cobbles. "Kate! Kate!" she shouted, and she shook Kate till she wakened with a flush of frightened red to her cheeks. "Kate," she said, "I thought I heard Father leading in a load of manure across the yard!"

Kate's flush deepened.

"Stacy, if you don't control yourself, your nerves will get the better of you completely. Where will you be then?" But as Kate spoke they heard the dray board of a cart being loosened in the yard and chains fell down on the cobbles with a ringing sound.

Kate sprang out of bed, throwing back the clothes right over the brass footrail, and left Stacy shivering where she lay, with the freezing air making snaps at her legs and her arms and her white neck. Kate stared out of the window.

"I knew this would happen," she said, "I could have told you!" Stacy got out of bed slowly and came over across the cold floor in her bare feet. She pressed her face against the icy glass. She began to cry in a thin wavering way like a child. Her nose was running, too; like a child's.

In the yard Ros was leading in a second cart of manure,

and talking in a high voice to the driver of the empty cart that was waiting its turn to pass out. She was dressed in her everyday clothes that weren't black, but brown; the dark primitive colour of the earth and the earth's decaying refuse. The cart she led was piled high with rude brown manure, stuck all over with bright stripes of yellow straw, and giving off a hot steam. The steam rose up unevenly like thumbby fingers of a clumsy hand and it reached for the faces of the staring women that were indistinct behind the fog their breaths put on the glass.

"Get dressed!" said Kate. "We'll go down together."

Ros was warming her hands by the fire when they went into the kitchen. There was a strong odour of manure. Kate said nothing, but she went over and banged the yard door shut. Stacy said nothing. Stacy stood. Ros looked up.

"Well?" said Ros.

"Well?" said Kate, after her, and she said it louder than Ros had said it.

The two women faced each other across the deal table. Stacy sat down on the chair that Ros had just left, and she began to cry in her thin wavy voice.

"Shut up, Stacy!" said Kate.

"Say what you have to say, Kate," said Ros, and in the minds of all three of them there was the black thought that bitter words could lash out endlessly, now that there was no longer a man in the house to come in across the yard with a heavy boot and stand in the doorway slapping his hands together and telling them to give up their nonsense and lay the table for the meal.

"Say what you have to say," said Ros.

"You know what we have to say," said Kate.

"Well, don't say it, so," said Ros, "if that's all it is." She went towards the door.

"Mother!" Stacy went after her and caught the corner of her mother's old skirt. "You were always saying it would be nice if it was once out of there."

"Isn't that my only regret, Stacy?" said Ros. "That was the only thing I crossed him over."

"But you were right, Mother."

"Was I?" said Ros, but not in the voice of one asking a

question. "Sometimes an old woman talks about things she knows nothing about. Your father always said it wasn't right to be ashamed of anything that was honest. Another time he said money was money, no matter where it came from. That was a true thing to say. He was always saying true things. Did you hear the priest yesterday when we were coming away from the grave? 'God help all poor widows!' he said."

"What has that got to do with what we're talking about?" said Kate.

"A lot," said Ros. "Does it never occur to the two of you that it mightn't be so easy for three women, and no man, to keep a house going and fires lighting and food on the table; to say nothing at all about dresses and finery?"

"I suppose that last is meant for me?" said Kate.

"That's just like what Father himself would say," said Stacy, but no one heard her. Kate had suddenly moved over near her mother and was leaning with her back against the white rim of the table. When she spoke it was more kindly.

"Did you find out how his affairs were fixed, Mother?" she said.

"I did," said Ros, and she looked at her daughter with cold eyes. "I did," she said again, and that was all she said as she went out the door.

The smell that came in the door made Stacy put her arm over her face and bury her nose in the crook of her elbow. But Kate drew herself up and her fine firm bosom swelled. She breathed in a strong breath.

"Pah!" she said. "How I hate it!"

"Think if it was a smell of lilacs!" said Stacy. "Lovely lilacs."

"I wish you'd stop crying," said Kate. "You can't blame her, after all, for not wanting to go against him and he dead. It's different for us."

Stacy's face came slowly out of the crook of her arm. She had a strange wondering look.

"Maybe when you and I are all alone, Kate?" she said, and then as she realized what she was saying she put her arm up quickly over her face in fright. "Not that I meant any harm," she said. "Poor Mother! poor Mother!"

Kate looked at her with contempt.

"You should learn to control your tongue, Stacy. And in any case, I wish you wouldn't be always talking as if we were never going to get married."

"I sometimes think we never will," said Stacy.

Kate shook out the tablecloth with a sharp flap in the warm air.

"Maybe you won't," she said. "I don't believe you will, as a matter of fact. But I will." She threw the tablecloth across the back of a chair and looked into the small shaving mirror belonging to their father that still hung on the wall.

In the small mirror Kate could see only her eyes and nose, unless she stood far back from it. And when she did that, as well as seeing herself, she could see the window, and through the window she could see the yard and anyone in it. And so, after she had seen that she looked just as she thought she would look, she stepped back a little from the glass and began to follow the moving reflections of her mother that she saw in. There seemed a greater significance in seeing her mother in this unreal way than there would have been in seeing her by looking directly out the window. The actions of Ros as she gathered up the fallen fragments of dung seemed to be symbolic of a great malevolent energy directed against her daughters.

"I didn't need to be so upset last night going to bed," she said to Stacy bitterly. "There's no fear of her going after my poor father. She's as hardy as a tree!"

But Ros Molloy wasn't cut out to be a widow. If Phelim had been taken from her before the dog-roses had faded on their first summer together she could hardly have moaned him more than she did, an old woman, cold and shivering, tossing in her big brass bed all alone.

The girls eased her work for her at every turn of the hand, but on Wednesday mornings they let her get up alone to open the gates at six o'clock and let in the carts of manure. They didn't sleep however.

As often as not Stacy got up, on to the cold floor in her bare feet, and stood at the window looking out. She crossed her arms over her breast to keep in what warmth she had taken from the blankets, and she told Kate what was going on outside.

"Did she look up at the window?" Kate asked one morning.

"No," Stacy said.

"Get back into bed so, and don't give her the satisfaction of knowing you're watching her."

"Kate."

"What?"

"You don't think I ought to slip down and see if the kettle is boiling for when she comes in, do you, Kate?"

"You know what I think," said Kate. "Will you get back into bed and not be standing there freezing!"

"She has only her thin coat on," said Stacy.

Kate leaned up on one elbow, carefully humping up the clothes with her, pegged to her shoulder.

"By all the pulling and rattling that I hear, she's doing enough to keep up her circulation, without her having any clothes at all on her."

"She shouldn't be lifting things the way she is," said Stacy.

"And whose fault is it if she is?" said Kate, slumping back into the hollows of the bed. "Get back here into bed, you, and stop watching out at her doing things there's no need in her doing at all. That's just what she wants; to have someone watching out at her."

"She's not looking this way at all, Kate."

"Oh, isn't she? Let me tell you, that woman has eyes in the back of her head!"

"Oh, Kate," said Stacy, and she ran over to the bed and threw herself in across Kate, sobbing. Kate lay still for a minute listening to her, and then she leaned up on her other elbow and humped the clothes up over the other shoulder. Stacy slept between her and the wall. "What in the name of God ails you now?" she asked.

"Don't you remember, Kate? That's what she used to say to us when we were small. She used to stand up straight and stiff, with her gold chain on her, and say that we had better not do anything wrong behind her back because she had eyes in the back of her head."

Kate flopped back again.

"We all have to get old," she said.

"I know," said Stacy, "but all the same you'd hate to see

the gold chain dangling down below her waist, like I did the other day, when she took it out of her black box and put it on her."

Kate sat up again.

"She's not wearing it, is she?"

"She put it back in the box."

Kate flopped back once more. Her face was flushed from the sudden jerks she gave in the cold morning air.

"I should hope she put it back," she said, "that chain is worth a lot of money since the price of gold went up."

Stacy lay still with her eyes closed. There was something wrong, but she didn't know just what it was. All she wanted was to get the dunghill taken away out of the yard and a few lilacs put there instead. But it seemed as if there were more than that bothering Kate. She wondered what it could be? She had always thought herself and Kate were the same, that they had the same way of looking at things, but lately Kate seemed to be changed.

Kate was getting old. Stacy took no account of age, but Kate was getting old. And Kate took account of everything. Stacy might have been getting old too, if she was taking account of things, but she wasn't. It seemed no length ago to Stacy since they came home from the convent. She couldn't tell you what year it was. She was never definite about anything. Her head was filled with nonsense, Kate said.

"What do you think about when you're lying inside there with a headache?" Kate asked her once.

"Things," Stacy said.

She would only be thinking of things; this thing and that thing; things of no account; silly things. Like the times she lay in bed and thought of a big lilac tree sprouting up through the boards of the floor, bending the big bright nails, sending splinters of wood flying till they hit off the window-panes. The tree always had big pointed bunches of lilac blossom all over it; more blossoms than leaves. That just showed, Stacy thought, what nonsense it was. You never saw more blossoms than leaves. But the blossoms weighed down towards her where she lay shivering, and they touched her face.

It was nonsense like that that went dawdling through her

mind one morning, when the knocking at the gate outside kept up for so long that she began to think her mother must have slept it out.

"Do you think she slept it out, Kate?"

"I hope she did," said Kate. "It might teach her a lesson."

"Maybe I ought to slip down and let them in?"

"Stay where you are."

But Stacy had to get up.

"I'll just look in her door," she said.

Stacy went out and left the door open.

"Hurry back and shut the door," said Kate, calling after her.

But Stacy didn't hurry. Stacy didn't come back either.

"Stacy! Stacy!" Kate called out.

She lifted her head off her pillow to listen.

"Stacy? Is there anything wrong?"

Kate sat up in the cold.

"Stacy! Can't you answer a person?"

Kate got out on the floor.

She found Stacy lying in a heap at her mother's bedside, and she hardly needed to look to know that Ros was dead. She as good as knew—she said afterwards—that Stacy would pass out the minute there was something unpleasant.

No wonder Stacy had no lines on her face. No wonder she looked a child, in spite of her years. Stacy got out of a lot of worry, very neatly, by just flopping off in a faint. Poor Ros was washed, and her eyes shut and her habit put on her, before Stacy came round to her senses again.

"It looks as if you're making a habit of this," said Kate, when Stacy fainted again, in the cemetery this time, and didn't have to listen, as Kate did, to the sound of the sods clodding down on the coffin.

"But I did hear them, Kate," Stacy protested. "I did. I heard them distinctly. But I was a bit confused in my mind still at the time, and I thought it was the sound of the horse-hooves clodding along the road."

"What horse-hooves? Are you going mad?"

"You remember, Kate. Surely you remember. The ones Mother was always telling us about. Her hair hung down her back and her gold chain dangled, and while she was watching

the road flashing by under the clittering horse-hooves she used to think how pretty the gold dung was, dried into bright discs."

"That reminds me!" said Kate. "To-morrow is Wednesday."

Although Stacy's face was wet with the moisture of her thin scalding tears, she smiled and clasped her hands together.

"Oh Kate!" she said; and then, in broad daylight, standing in the middle of the floor in her new serge mourning dress that scraped the back of her neck all the time, she saw a heavy lilac tree nod at her with its lovely pale blooms bobbing.

"Which of us will get up?" Kate was saying, and watching Stacy while she was saying it.

"Get up?"

"To let them in."

"To let who in?"

"Who do you think? The men with the manure, of course." Kate spoke casually, but when she looked at Stacy she stamped her foot on the floor.

"Don't look so stupid, Stacy. There isn't any time now to let them know. We can't leave them hammering at the gate after coming miles, maybe. Someone will have to go down and open the gate for them."

When Stacy heard the first rap on the gate she hated to think of Kate's having to get up.

"I'll get up, Kate," she said. "Stay where you are."

But she got no answer. Kate was walking out across the yard at the time, dressed and ready, and she had the gate thrown back against the wall before the men had time to raise their hands for a second rap.

Stacy dressed as quickly as she could, to have the kettle on as a surprise for Kate. It was the least she might do.

But when Stacy went down the fire was blazing up the chimney and there was a trace of tea in a cup on the table. Poor Kate, thought Stacy, she must have been awake half the night in case she'd let the time slip. Wasn't she great! Stacy felt very stupid. She was no good at all. Kate was great. Here was their great moment. Here was the time for getting rid of a nuisance, and if it was up to her to tell the men not to bring any more cartloads she honestly believed she'd be putting

it off for weeks and be afraid to do it in the end, maybe. But Kate was great. Kate made no bones about it. Kate didn't say a word about how she was going to do it, or what she was going to say. She just slipped out of bed and made a cup of tea and went out in the yard and took command of everything. Kate was great.

"What did you say?" asked Stacy, when Kate came in.

"How do you mean?" said Kate and looked at her irritably.

"What on earth gave you such a high colour at this hour of the morning? I never saw you with so much colour in your face before?"

But the colour was fading out already.

"Didn't you tell them not to bring any more?" she asked.

Kate looked as if she were going to say something, and then she changed her mind. Then she changed her mind again, or else she thought of something different to say.

"I didn't like to give them the hard word," she said.

Stacy flushed again.

"I see what you mean," she said: "we'll ease off quietly?"

"Yes," said Kate. "Yes, we could do that. Or I was thinking of another plan."

Stacy knelt up on a hard deal chair and gripped the back of it. There was something very exciting in hearing Kate talk and plan. It gave Stacy a feeling that they had a great responsibility and authority and that they were standing on their own feet.

"You mightn't like the idea," said Kate, "at first."

"Oh, I'm sure I'll love it," said Stacy.

"It's this then," said Kate. "I was thinking last night that instead of doing away with the dunghill we should take in twice as much manure for a while till we made twice as much money, and then we could get out of this little one-story house altogether."

Stacy was looking out the window.

"Well?" said Kate.

Stacy laid her face against the glass.

"Oh for goodness' sake stop crying," said Kate; "I was only making a suggestion." She began to clatter the cups on the dresser. She looked back at Stacy. "I thought, you see, that after a bit we might move over to Rowe House. It's been

idle a long time. I don't think they'd want very much for it, and it's two-story, what's more, with a front entrance and steps going up to the hall door."

Stacy dried her face in the crook of her arm and began to put back the cups that Kate had taken down from the dresser, because the table was already set. Her face had the strained and terrible look that people with weak natures have when they force their spirits beyond their bounds.

"I'll never leave this house," she said; "never as long as I live."

"Stay in it, so!" said Kate. "And rot in it for all I care. But I'm getting out of it the first chance I get! And that dunghill isn't stirring from where it is until I have a fine fat dowry out of it."

She went into the bedroom and banged the door, and Stacy sat down looking at the closed door. Then she looked out the window. Then she got up and ran her hand down over the buttons of her bodice. They were all closed properly. She took the tea-caddy and began to put two careful spoonfuls of tea into the teapot. When the tea was some minutes made, she went over to the closed door. Once again she ran her hand down the buttons of her bodice; and then she called Kate.

"Your tea is getting cold," she said, and while she waited for an answer her heart beat out its fear upon her hollow chest.

But Kate was in a fine good humour when she came out, with her arms piled up with dresses and hats and cardboard boxes covered with rose-scattered wallpaper. She left the things down on the window sill and pulled her chair in to the table.

"Is this loaf bread or turnover?" she said. "It tastes very good. Sit down yourself, Stacy," and after a mouthful of the hot tea she nodded her head at the things on the window sill.

"There's no point in having a room idle, is there?" she said. "I may as well move into Mother's room."

There was no more mention of the dunghill. Kate attended to it. Stacy didn't have her headaches as bad as she used to have them. Not giving in to them was the best cure yet. Kate was right. There was only a throbbing. It wasn't bad.

Stacy and Kate got on great. At least there was no fighting. But the house was as uneasy as a house where two women live alone. At night you felt it most. So Stacy was glad at the back of everything when Con O'Toole began dropping in, although she didn't like him and she thought the smell of stale tobacco that was all over the house next day was worse than the smell of the dung.

"Do you like the smell of his pipe, Kate?" said Stacy one day.

"I never noticed," said Kate.

"I think it's worse than the smell of the dung!" said Stacy with a gust of bravery.

"I thought we agreed on saying 'fertilizer' instead of that word you just used," said Kate, stopping up in the dusting.

"That was when we were at boarding school!" said Stacy, going on with the dusting.

"I beg your pardon," said Kate, "it was when we were mixing with the right kind of people. I wish you wouldn't be so forgetful."

But next morning Kate came into the parlour when Stacy was nearly finished with the dusting. She threw out her firm chest and drew in a deep breath.

"Pah!" she said. "It is disgusting. I'll make him give up using it as soon as we take up residence at Rowe House. But don't say anything about it to him. He mightn't take it well. Of course I can say anything I like to him. He'll take anything from me. But it's better to wait till after we're married and not come on him with everything all at once."

That was the first Stacy heard about Kate's getting married, but of course if she had only thought about it she'd have seen the way the wind was blowing. But she took no account of anything.

After the first mention of the matter, however, Kate could hardly find time to talk about anything else, right up to the fine blowsy morning that she was hoisted up on the car by Con, in her new peacock blue outfit, and her mother's gold chain dangling. Stacy was almost squeezed out of the doorway by the crowd of well-wishers waving them off. They all came back into the house. Such a mess! Chairs pulled about! Crumbs on the cushions! Confetti! Wine spilled all over the

carpet! And the lovely iced cake all cut into! Such a time as there would be cleaning it all up! And Stacy thought that when she'd be putting things back in their places would be a good time to make a few changes. That chair with the red plush would be better on the other side of the piano. And she'd draw the sofa out a bit from the wall.

"Will you be lonely, Miss Stacy?" said someone.

"You should get someone in, to keep you company, Miss Stacy," said someone else.

"At night anyway," they all said.

They were very kind. Stacy loved hearing them all making plans for her. It was so good-natured. But this was the first time she'd ever got a chance to make a few plans for herself, and she wished they'd hurry up and go.

They didn't stay so very long. They were soon all gone, except Jasper Kane. Jasper liked Stacy, apart from his being the family solicitor, and knowing her father so well.

"Might I inquire, Miss Stacy, what is the first thing you're planning to do, now that you are your own mistress?"

Stacy went over to the window.

"I'm going to plant a few lilac trees, Mr. Kane," she said, because she felt she could trust him. Her father always did.

"Oh!" said Jasper, and he looked out the window, too. "Where?" he said.

"There!" said Stacy, pointing out of the back window.

"There where the dunghill is now." She drew a brave breath.

"I'm getting rid of the dunghill, you see," she said.

Jasper stayed looking out of the window at the dunghill. Then he looked at Stacy. He was an old man.

"But what will you live on, Miss Stacy?" he said.



The Green Grave and the Black Grave



It was a body all right. It was hard to see in the dark, and the scale-back sea was heaving up between them and the place where they saw the thing floating. But it was a body all right.

"I knew it was a shout I heard," said the taller of the two tall men in the black boat, that was out fishing for mackerel. He was Tadg Mor and he was the father of the less tall man, that was blacker in the hair than him and broader in the chest than him, but was called Tadg Beag because he was son to him. *Mor* means "big" and *Beag* means "small," but *Mor* can be given to mean "greater" and *Beag* can be given to mean "lesser than the greater."

"I knew it was a shout I heard," said Tadg Mor.

"I knew it was a boat I saw and I dragging in the second net," said Tadg Beag.

"I said the sound I heard was a kittiwake, crying in the dark."

"And I said the boat I saw was a black wave blown up on the wind."

"It was a shout all right."

"It was a boat all right."

"It was a body all right."

"But where is the black boat?" said Tadg Beag.

"It must be that the black boat capsized," said Tadg Mor, "and went down into the green sea."

"Whose boat was it, would you venture for to say?" said Tadg Beag, pulling stroke for stroke at the sea.

"I'd venture for to say it was the boat of Eamon Og Murnan," said Tadg Mor, pulling with his oar at the spittle-painted sea.

The tall men rowed against the sharp up-pointing waves of the scaly, scurvy sea. They rowed to the clumsy thing that tossed on the tips of the deft green waves.

"Eamon Og Murnan!" said Tadg Mor, lifting clear his silver-dropping oar.

"Eamon Og Murnan," said Tadg Beag lifting his clear, drip-less, yellow oar.

It was a hard drag, dragging him over the arching sides of the boat. His clothes logged him down to the water and the jutting waves jolted him back against the boat. His yellow hair slipped from their fingers like floss, and the loose fibres of his island-spun clothes broke free from their grip. But they got him up over the edge of the boat, at the end of a black hour that was only lit by the whiteness of the breaking wave. They laid him down on the boards of the floor on their haul of glittering mackerel, and they spread the nets out over him. But the scales of the fish glittered up through the net and so, too, the eyes of Eamon Og Murnan glittered up through the nets. And the live glitter of those dead eyes put a strain on Tadg Mor and he turned the body over on its face among the fish; and when they had looked a time at the black corpse with yellow hair, set in the silver and opal casket of fishes, they put the ends of the oars in the oarlocks and turned the oar-blades out again into the scurvy seas, and turned their boat back to the land.

"How did you know it was Eamon Og Murnan, and we forty pointed waves away from him at the time of your naming his name?" said Tadg Beag to Tadg Mor.

"Whenever it is a thing that a man is pulled under by the sea," said Tadg Mor, "think around in your mind until you think out which man of all the men it might be that would be the man most missed, and that man, that you think out in your mind, will be the man that will be netted up on the shingle."

"This is a man that will be missed mightily," said Tadg Beag.

"He is a man that will be mightily bemoaned," said Tadg Mor.

"He is a man that will never be replaced."

"He is a man that will be prayed for bitterly and mightily."

"And food will be set out for him every night in a bowl," said Tadg Beag.

"The Brightest and the Bravest!" said Tadg Mor. "Those are the words that will be read over him—the Brightest and the Bravest."

The boat rose up on the points of the waves and clove down again between the points, and the oars of Tadg Mor and the oars of Tadg Beag split the points of many waves.

"How is it the green sea always greeds after the Brightest and the Bravest?" Tadg Beag asked Tadg Mor.

"And for the only sons?" asked Tadg Mor.

"And the widows' sons?"

"And the men with one-year wives?"

"The one-year wife that's getting this corpse to-night," said Tadg Mor, pointing down with his eyes, "will have a black sorrow this night."

"And every night after this night," said Tadg Beag, because he was a young man and knew about such things.

"It's a great thing that he was not dragged down to the green grave, and that is a thing will lighten the nights of the one-year wife," said Tadg Mor.

"It isn't many are saved out of the green grave," said Tadg Beag.

"Kirnan Mor wasn't got," said Tadg Mor.

"And Murnan Beag wasn't got."

"Lorcan Mor wasn't got."

"Tirnan Beag wasn't got."

"It was three weeks and the best part of a night before the Frenchman with the leather coat was got, and five boats out looking for him."

"It was seven weeks before Lorcan MacKinealy was got, and his eye-sockets emptied by the gulls and the gannies."

"And by the waves. The waves are great people to lick out your eyeballs!" said Tadg Mor.

"It was a good thing, this man to be got," said Tadg Beag, "and his eyes bright in his head."

"Like he was looking up at the sky!"

"Like he was thinking to smile next thing he'd do."

"He was a great man to smile, this man," said Tadg Mor.
"He was ever and always smiling."

"He was a great man to laugh too," said Tadg Beag. "He was ever and always laughing."

"Times he was laughing and times he was not laughing," said Tadg Mor.

"Times all men stop from laughing," said Tadg Beag.

"Times I saw this man and he not laughing. Times I saw him and he putting out in the black boat looking back at the inland woman where she'd be standing on the shore and her hair weaving the wind, and there wouldn't be any laugh on his face those times."

"An island man should take an island wife," said Tadg Beag.

"An inland woman should take an inland man."

"The inland woman that took this man had a dreadful dread on her of the sea and the boats that put out in it."

"I saw this woman from the inlands standing on the shore, times, from his putting out with the hard dry boat to his coming back with the shivering silver-belly boat."

"He got it hard to go from her every night."

"He got it harder than iron to go from her if there was a streak of storm gold in the sky at time of putting out."

"An island man should not be held down to a woman from the silent inlands."

"It was love-talk and love-looks that held down this man," said Tadg Mor.

"The island women give love-words and love-talks too," said Tadg Beag.

"But not the love-words and the love-looks of this woman," said Tadg Mor.

"Times I saw her wetting her feet in the waves and wetting her fingers in the waves and you'd see she was a kind of loving the waves so they'd bring him back to her."

"Times he told me himself she had a dreadful dread of the green grave. 'There dies as many men in the inlands as in the islands,' I said. 'Tell her that,' I said, 'I tell her that,' said he. 'But they get the black grave burial,' she says, 'they get the black grave burial in clay that's blessed by two priests and they get the speeding of the green sods thrown down by their kinsmen,' she says. 'Tell her there's no worms in the green

grave,' I said to him. 'I did,' said he. 'What did she say to that?' said I. 'She said: 'The bone waits for the bone,' said he. 'What does she mean by that?' said I. 'She gave another saying as her meaning to that saying,' said he. 'She said, 'There's no trouble in death when two go down together into the one black grave. Clay binds closer than love,' she said, 'but the green grave binds nothing,' she said. 'The green grave scatters,' she said. 'The green grave is for sons,' she said, 'and for brothers,' she said, 'but the black grave is for lovers,' she said, 'and for husbands in the faithful clay under the jealous sods.'"

"She must be a great woman to make sayings," said Tadg Beag.

"She made great sayings for that man every hour of the day, and she stitching the nets for him on the step while he'd be salting fish or blading oars."

"She'll be glad us to have saved him from the salt green grave."

"It's a great wonder but he was dragged down before he was got."

"She is the kind of woman that always has great wonders happening round her," said Tadg Mor. "If she is a woman from the inlands itself, she has a great power in herself. She has a great power over the sea. Times—and she on the cliff-shore and her hair weaving the wind, like I told you—I'd point my eyes through the wind across at where Eamon Og would be in the waves back of me, and there wouldn't be as much as one white tongue of spite rising out of the waves around his boat, and my black boat would be splattered over every board of it with white sea-spittle."

"I heard tell of women like that. She took the fury out of the sea and burned it out to white salt in her own heart."

The talk about the inland woman who fought the seas in her heart was slow talk and heavy talk, and slow and heavy talk was fit talk as the scurvy waves crawled over one another, scale by scale, and brought the bitter boat back to the shore.

Sometimes a spiteful tongue of foam forked up in the dark by the side of the boat and reached for the netted corpse on the boards. When this happened Tadg Beag picked up the loose end of the raggy net and lashed out with it at the sea.

"Get down, you scaly-belly serpent," he said, "and let the corpse dry out in his dead-clothes."

"Take heed to your words, Tadg Beag," Tadmor would say. "We have the point to round yet. Take heed to your words!"

"Here's a man took heed to his words and that didn't save him," said Tadmor. "Here was a man was always singing back song for song to the singing sea, and look at him now lying there."

They looked at him lying on his face under the brown web of the nets in his casket of fish scales, silver and opal. And as they looked another lick of the forked and venomous tongue of the sea came up the side of the boat and strained in towards the body. Tadmor beat at it with the raggy net.

"Keep your strength for the loud knocking you'll have to give on the wooden door," said Tadmor. And Tadmor understood that he was the one would walk up the shingle and bring the death news to the one-year wife, who was so strange among the island women with her hair weaving the wind at evening and her white feet wetted in the sea by day.

"Is it not a thing that she'll be, likely, out on the shore?" he said in a bright hope, pointing his eyes to where the white edge of the shore-wash shone by its own light in the dark.

"Is there a storm to-night?" said Tadmor. "Is there a high wind to-night? Is there a rain spate? Are there any signs of danger on the sea?"

"No," said Tadmor, "there are none of those things that you mention."

"I will tell you the reason you ask that question," said Tadmor. "You ask that question because that question is the answer that you'd like to get."

"It's a hard thing to bring news to a one-year wife and she one that has a dreadful dread of the sea," said Tadmor.

"It's good news you're bringing to the one-year wife when you bring news that her man is got safe, to go down like any inlander into a black grave blessed and tramped down with the feet of his kinsmen on the sod."

"It's a queer thing him to be caught by the sea on a fine night with no wind blowing," said Tadmor.

"On a fine night the women lie down to sleep, and if any

woman has a power over the sea, with her white feet in the water and her black hair in the wind and a bright fire in her heart, the sea can only wait until that woman's spirit is out of her body, likely back home in the inlands, and then the sea serpent gives a slow turn-over on his scales, one that you wouldn't heed to yourself, maybe, and you standing up with no hold on the oars; and before there's time for more than the first shout out of you the boat is logging-down to the depths of the water. And all the time the woman that would have saved you, with her willing and wishing for you, is in the deep bed of a dark sleep, having no knowledge of the thing that has happened until she hears the loud-handed knocking of the neighbour on the door outside."

Tadg Beag knocked with his knuckles on the side-boards of the boat.

"Louder than that," said Tadg Mor.

Tadg Beag knocked another louder knock on the boat sides.

"Have you no more knowledge than that of how to knock at a door in the fastness of the night and the people inside the house buried in sleep and the corpse down on the shore getting covered with sand and the fish scales drying into him so tight that the fingernails of the washing women will be broken and split peeling them off him? Have you no more knowledge than that of how to knock with your knuckle-bones?"

Tadg Mor gave a loud knocking against the wet seat of the boat.

"That is the knock of a man that you might say knows how to knock at a door, daytime or night-time," he said, and he knocked again.

And he knocked again, louder, if it could be that any knock he gave could be louder than the first knock. Tadg Beag listened and then he spoke, not looking at Tadg Mor, but looking at the oar he was rolling in the water.

"Two people knocking would make a loud knocking entirely, I would think," he said.

"One has to stay with the dead," said Tadg Mor.

Tadg Beag drew a long stroke on the oar and he drew a long breath out of his lungs, and he took a long look at the nearing shore.

"What will I say," he said, "when she comes to my knocking?"

"When she comes to the knocking, step back a bit from the door, so's she'll see the wet shining on you, and so's she'll smell the salt water off you, and say in a loud voice that the sea is queer and rough this night."

"She'll be down with her to the shore if that's what I say—without waiting to hear more."

"Say then," said Tadhg Mor, pulling in the oar to slow the boat a bit, "say that there's news come in that a boat went down off beyond the point."

"If I say that, she'll be down with her to the shore without waiting to hear more, and her hair flying and her white feet freezing on the shingle."

"If that is so," said Tadhg Mor, "then you'll have to stand back bold from the door and call out loudly in the night, 'The Brightest and the Bravest!'"

"What will she say to that?"

"She'll say, 'God bless them!'"

"And what will I say to that?"

"You'll say, 'God rest them!'"

"And what will she say to that?"

"She'll say, 'Is it in the black grave or the green grave?'"

"And what will I say to that?"

"You say, 'God rest Eamon Og Murnan in the black grave in the holy ground, blessed by the priest and sodded by the people.'"

"And what will she say to that?"

"She'll say, likely, 'Bring him in to me, Tadhg Beag!'"

"And what will I say to that?"

"Whatever you say after that, let it be loud and making echoes under the rafters, so she won't hear the sound of the corpse dragging up on the shingle, and when he's lifted up on to the scoured table, let whatever you say be loud then too, so's she won't be listening for the sound of the water drabbling down off his clothes on the floor!"

There was only the noise of the oars then, till a shoaly sounding stole in between the oar-strokes. It was the shoaly sounding of the irritable pebbles that were dragged back and forth on the shore by the tides.

They beached in a little while, and they stepped out among the sprawling waves and dragged the boat after them till it cleft its depth in the damp shingle.

"See that you give a loud knocking, Tadg Beag," said Tadg Mor, and Tadg Beag set his head against the darkness, and his feet were heard for a good time grinding down the shifting shingle as he made for the house of the one-year wife. The house was set in a shrifty sea-field, and his feet did not sound down to the shore once he got to the dune grass of the shrifty sea-field. But in another little while there was a loud sound of a fist knocking hard upon wood, stroke after stroke of a strong hand coming down on hard wood. Tadg Mor, waiting with the body in the boat, recalled to himself all the times he went knocking on the island doors bringing news to the women of the death of their men, but island women were brought up in bitterness, and they got life as well as death from the sea. They keened for the dead, but it would be hard to know by their keening whether it was for their own men or the men of their neighbours they were keening. Island wives were the daughters of island widows. The sea gave food. The sea gave death. Life or death, it was all one thing in the end. The sea never lost its scabs. The sea was there before the coming of man. Island women knew that knowledge, but what knowledge had a woman from the inlands of the sea and its place in the world since the beginning of time? No knowledge. An inland woman had no knowledge to guide her when the loud knocking came on her door in the night. Tadg Mor listened to the loud, hard knocking of his son Tadg Beag on the door of the one-year wife of Eamon Og Murnan that was lying in the silver casket of fishes on the floor of the boat, cleft fast in the shingle sand. The night was cold, the fish scales glittered even though it was dark. They glittered in the whiteness made by the breaking wave on the shore. The sound of the sea was sadder than the back of the head of the yellow-haired corpse, but still Tadg Mor was gladder to be down on the shore than up in the dune-grass knocking at the one-night widow's door.

The knocking sound of Tadg Beag's knuckles on the wooden door was a human sound and it sounded good in the ears of Tadg Mor for a time; but, like all sounds that continue too long, it sounded soon to be as weird and inhuman as the wash-

ing sound of the waves tiding in on the shingle. Tadg Mor put up his rounded palms to his mouth and shouted out to Tadg Beag to come back to the boat. Tadg Beag came back running over the shingle, and the air was grained with sounds of sliding gravel.

"There's no one in the house where you were knocking," said Tadg Mor.

"I knocked louder on the door than you knocked on the boat boards," said Tadg Beag.

"I heard how you knocked," said Tadg Mor; "you knocked well. But let you knock better when you go to the neighbour's house to find out where the one-night widow is from her own home this night."

"If I got no answer at one door is it likely I'll get an answer at another door?" said Tadg Beag. "It was you yourself I heard to say one time that the man that knows how a thing is to be done is the man should do that thing when that thing is to be done."

"How is a man to get the knowledge of how to do a thing if that man doesn't do that thing when that thing is to be done?" said Tadg Mor.

Tadg Beag got into the boat again and they sat there in the dark. After four or maybe five waves had broken by their side, Tadg Beag lifted the net and felt the clothes of Eamon Og.

"The clothes are drying into him," he said.

"If I was to go up with you to the house of Sean-bhean O Suillebheain who would there be to watch the dead?" said Tadg Mor, and then Tadg Beag knew that Tadg Mor was going with him and he had no need to put great heed on the answer he gave to him.

"Let the sea watch him," he said, putting a leg out over the boat after the wave went back with its fistful of little complaining pebbles.

"We must take him out of the boat first," said Tadg Mor. "Take hold of him there by the feet," he said as he rolled back the net, putting it over the oar with each roll so it would not ravel and knot.

They lifted Eamon Og Murnan out of the boat and the mackerel slipped about their feet into the place where he had left his shape. They dragged him up a boat-length from the sprawling waves, and they faced his feet to the shore, but when

they saw that that left his head lower than his feet, because the shingle shelved greatly at that point, they faced him about again towards the scurvy waves that were clashing their sharp, pointy scales together and sending up spits of white spray in the air. The dead man glittered with the silver and verdigris scales of the mackerel that were clinging to his clothing over every part.

Tadg Mor went up the sliding shingle in front of Tadg Beag, and Tadg Beag put his feet in the shelves that were made in the shingle by Tadg Mor because the length of the step they took was the same length. The sea sounded in their ears as they went through the shingle, but by the time the first coarse dune-grass scratched at their clothing the only sound that each could hear was the sound of the other's breathing.

The first cottage that rose out blacker than the night in their path was the cottage where Tadg Beag made the empty knocking. Tadg Mor stopped in front of the door as if he might be thinking of trying his hand at knocking, but he thought better of it and went on after Tadg Beag to the house that was next to that house, and that was the house of Sean-bhean O Suillebheain, one to know anything that eye or ear could know about those that lived within three right miles of her. Tadg Mor hit the door of Sean-bhean O Suillebheain's house with a knock of his knuckles, and although it was a less loud knock than the echo of the knock that came down to the shore when Tadg Beag struck the first knock on the door of the wife of Eamon Og, there was a foot to the floor before he could raise his knuckle off the wood for another knock.

A candle lit up and a shadow fell across the windowpane and a face came whitening at the door-gap.

"You came to the wrong house this dark night," said Sean-bhean O Suillebheain. "The sea took all the men was ever in this house twelve years ago and two months and seventeen days."

"It may be that we have no corpse for this house, but we came to the right house for all that," said Tadg Mor. "We came to this house for knowledge of the house across two sea-fields from this house, where we got no answer to our knocking with our knuckles," said Tadg Mor.

"And I knocked with a stone up out of the ground, as well," said Tadg Beag, coming closer.

The woman with the candle-flame blowing drew back into the dark.

"Is it for the inland woman, the one-year wife, you're bringing the corpse you have below in the boat this night?" she said.

"It is, God help us," said Tadhg Mor.

"It is, God help us," said Tadhg Beag.

"The Brightest and the Bravest," said Tadhg Mor.

"Is it a thing that you got no answer to your knocking?" said the old woman, bending out again with the blowing candle-flame.

"No answer," said Tadhg Beag, "and sturdy knocking."

"Knocking to be heard above the sound of the sea," said Tadhg Mor.

"They sleep deep, the people from the inland?" said Tadhg Beag, asking a question.

"The people of the inland sleep deep in the cottage in the middle of the field," said Sean-bhean O Suillebheain, "but when they're rooted up and set down by the sea their spirit never passes out of hearing of the step on the shingle. It's a queer thing entirely that you got no answer to your knocking."

"We got no answer to our knocking," said Tadhg Mor and Tadhg Beag, bringing their words together like two oars striking the one wave, one on this side of the boat and one on that.

"When the inland woman puts her face down on the feather pillow," said the Sean-bhean O Suillebheain, "that pillow is but as the sea shells children put against their ears, that pillow has in it the sad crying voices of the sea."

"Is it that you think she is from home this night?" said Tadhg Mor.

"It must be a thing that she is," said the old woman.

"Is it back to her people in the inlands she'll be gone?" said Tadhg Beag, who had more than the curiosity of the night in him.

"Step into the kitchen," said the old woman, "while I ask Inghean Og if she saw Bean Eamon Og go from her house this night."

While she went into the room that was in from the kitchen, Tadhg Beag put a foot inside the kitchen door, but Tadhg Mor stayed looking down to the shore.

"If it is a thing the inland woman is from home entirely, where will we put Eamon Og, that we have below on the shore,

with his face and no sheet on it, and his eyes and no lids drawn down tight over them, and the fish scales sticking to him faster than they stuck to the mackerels when they swam beyond the nets, blue and silver and green ? ”

“ Listen to Inghean Og,” said Tadhg Beag, and he stepped a bit farther into the kitchen of Sean-bhean O Suillebheain.

“ Inghean Og,” same the voice of the old, old woman, “ is it a thing that the inland woman from two fields over went from her house this night ? ”

“ It is a true thing that she went,” said Inghean Og, and Tadhg Beag spoke to Tadhg Mor and said:

“ Inghean Og talks soft in the day, but she talks as soft as the sea in summer when she talks in the night in the dark.”

“ Listen to what she says,” said Tadhg Mor, coming in a step after Tadhg Beag.

“ Is it that she went to her people in the inlands ? ” said Sean-bhean O Suillebheain, who never left the island.

“ The wife of Eamon Og never stirred a foot to her people in the inlands since the first day she came to the islands, in her blue dress with the beads,” said the voice of Inghean Og.

“ Where did she go then ? ” said the old woman. “ If it is a thing that she didn’t go to her people in the inlands ? ”

“ Where else but where she said she’d go,” said the voice of Inghean Og, “ out in the boat with her one-year husband ? ”

There was sound of aged springs writhing in the room where Inghean Og slept, back behind the kitchen, and her voice was clearer and stronger like as if she were sitting up in the bed looking out at the black sea and the white points rising in it, lit by the light of their own brightness.

“ She said the sea would never drag Eamon Og down to the cold green grave and leave her to lie lonely in the black grave on the shore, in the black clay that held tight, under the weighty sods. She said a man and woman should lie in the one grave for ever. She said a night never passed without her heart being burnt out to a cold white salt. She said that this night, and every night after, she’d go out with Eamon in the black boat over the scabby back of the sea. She said if ever he got the green grave, she’d get the green grave too, with her arms clinging to him closer than the weeds of the sea, binding them down together. She said that the island women never fought

the sea. She said that the sea wanted taming and besting. She said the island women had no knowledge of love. She said there was a curse on the black clay for women that lay alone in it while their men floated in the caves of the sea. She said that the black clay was all right for inland women. She said that the black clay was all right for sisters and mothers. She said the black clay was all right for girls that died at seven years. But the green grave is the grave for wives, she said, and she went out in the black boat this night and she's going out every night after," said Inghean Og.

"Tell her there will be no night after," said Tadg Mor.

"Let her sleep till day," said Tadg Beag. "Time enough to tell her in the day," and he strained his eyes back of the flutter-flame candle as the old woman came out from Inghean Og's room.

"You heard what she said?" said the old woman.

"It's a bad thing he was got," said Tadg Beag.

"That's a thing was never said on this island before this night," said Tadg Mor.

"There was a fire on every point of the cliff-shore," said the old woman, "to light home the men who were dragging for Kirnan Mor."

"And he never was got," said Tadg Mor.

"There was a shroud spun for Tirnan Beag between the time of the putting-out of the island boats to look for him and their coming back with the empty news in the green daylight," said the old woman.

"Tirnan Beag was never got."

"Kirnan Mor was never got."

"Lorcan Mor was never got."

"Murnan Beag was never got."

"My four sons were never got," said the old woman.

"The father of Inghean Og was never got," said Tadg Beag, and he was looking at the shut door of the room where Inghean Og was lying in the dark; the candle shadows were running their hands over that door.

"The father of Inghean Og was never got," said Tadg Beag again, forgetting what he was saying.

"Of all the men that had yellow coffins standing up on their ends by the gable, and all the men that had brown

shrouds hanging up on the wall with the iron nail eating out its way through the yarn, it had to be the one man that should have never been got that was got," said Tadhg Beag, opening the top half of the door and letting in the deeper sound of the tide.

"That is the way," said Tadhg Mor.

"That is ever and always the way," said the old woman.

"The sea is stronger than any man," said Tadhg Mor.

"The sea is stronger than any woman," said Tadhg Beag.

"The sea is stronger than women from the inland fields," said Tadhg Mor.

"The sea is stronger than talk of love," said Tadhg Beag, when he was out in the dark. It was too dark, after the candle-light, to see where the window was of Inghean Og's room, but he was looking where it might be while he buttoned over his jacket.

Tadhg Mor and Tadhg Beag went back to the shore over the sliding shingle, keeping their feet well on the shelving gravel, as they went towards the sprawling waves. The waves were up to the place where the sea-break was made that spring in the greywacke wall.

The boat was floating free out of the cleft in the shingle. The body of Eamon Og, that had glittered with fish scales of opal and silver and verdigris, was gone from the shore. It was gone from the black land that was cut crisscross with grave-cuts by the black spade and the shovel. It was gone and would never be got. And the men spoke together.

"Kirnan Mor wasn't got."

"Murnan Beag wasn't got."

"Lorcan Mor wasn't got."

"Tirnan Beag wasn't got."

"The four sons of the Sean-bhean O Suillebheain were never got."

"The father of Inghean Og wasn't got."

The men of the island were caught down in the sea by the tight weeds of the sea. They were held in the tendrils of the sea anemone and the pricks of the willowthorn, by the green sea-grasses and the green sea-reeds and the winding stems of the green sea-daffodils. But Eamon Og Murnan would be held fast in the white sea-arms of his one-year wife, who came from the inlands where women have no knowledge of the sea and have only a knowledge of love.



Sarah



Sarah had a bit of a bad name. That was the worst the villagers said of her, although Sarah had three children, and was unmarried, and although, moreover, there was a certain fortuity in her choice of fathers for them. She was a great worker, tireless and strong, and several people in the village got her in by the day to scrub. Women with sons, and young brides, took care not to hire her, but oftentimes they were the very people who were the kindest to her. Not one of the children was born in the workhouse, and it was the most upright matron in the village that slapped life into every one of them !

“ She is a good girl at heart,” said Mrs. Muldoon. “ We are all born with a tendency to evil.”

“ How could the poor girl know any better ? ” said another neighbour. “ Living with two rough brothers, without mother or sister ! ”

“ And who ever remembers any talk of her having a father herself ? ” said Mrs. Muldoon.

If Sarah had been one to lie in bed on a Sunday morning, and miss Mass, the villagers would have shunned her, and crossed their breasts when they spoke of her. There was greater understanding in their hearts for sins against God than there was for sins against the Church. And Sarah found it easy to keep the commands of the servant of the Lord, even if she found it somewhat difficult to keep the commands of the Lord Himself. She did the Stations as often as anyone. She never missed Mass. And if there was a Lady Day, or a Holy Day, when the countryside gathered at the holy well in the next village, Sarah was always a credit to her own village, with

her shoes off walking on the flinty stones, doing her penance for all the world like a holy nun. If any comments were made the other villagers, Sarah's neighbours, were quicker than Sarah herself to take offence. But with all this they tempered their charity with prudence on occasions, and when Kathleen Kedrigan, wife of Oliver Kedrigan, a newly married woman who had recently come to the village, spoke of getting Sarah in to keep the place clean for her while she was going up to Dublin to see a doctor, there wasn't a woman in the place who didn't feel it her duty to step across to Kedrigans' and offer a word of advice.

"I know she has a bit of a bad name," said Kathleen, "but she's a great worker. She can scrub a floor till it's as white as a piece of a rope! And she can bake better than anyone I ever knew, except my own mother!"

"All the same," said the neighbour, "I'd advise you to think twice before you'd leave her minding your house while you're away."

"She's only coming in for a few hours in the morning to give the floors a scrub, and to bake bread for Oliver. He's going to take his dinner across the fields at his brother's place."

"All the same," said another neighbour, "I wouldn't have her near the house at all, if I were you!"

"Who else is there I could get?"

"Why do you want anyone? You'll only be gone for two or three days!"

"Two or three days is a long time to leave the house in the care of a man."

"I'd sooner let the roof fall in, if I were you, than trust that brazen thing about the house."

"It isn't her I'd trust! It's Oliver," said Kathleen.

"It's not right to trust any man too far!"

Kathleen Kedrigan smiled and her pale papery face showed her contempt for the older women.

"Oliver isn't that sort!"

"She's a good-looking girl," said one woman, stung by Kathleen's smile.

"She has a secret way of looking at men," said the other woman. "I suppose you know your own business, but I don't

think it's right to trust any man, even the greatest saint that ever walked, with a woman like Sarah."

"I'd trust Oliver with every fancy woman in Ireland!"

"All right," said the two women, speaking at once. "It's your man, not ours. I don't know why we should worry about him!"

The women went out and Kathleen watched after them resentfully. She may not have been altogether serious about hiring Sarah Murray, but as she closed the door she made up her mind definitely. She was goaded on by a passionate pride in her own legitimate power over Oliver. She could trust him. And she'd let everyone see that she could!

The women went down the road, and as they went they talked about Oliver Kedrigan.

"I don't know why he ever married that bleached-out doll. I wonder why she's going to Dublin? Isn't Dr. Deignan good enough for her? She doesn't look like a girl that would have a healthy child!"

As they passed Sarah's cottage they saw Sarah at the gate.

"She's expecting someone!" they said to each other, and as they went homeward they twitched their shoulders uneasily, filled with a strange uncontrollable envy of her youth and her brazen mind, and her slow leopardy beauty.

Sarah came over to Kedrigans' the morning Kathleen was going, and made her a cup of tea before she left. She carried her bag down to the bus for her as well, and so Kathleen didn't see the hired girl and Oliver standing in the sunlight, as the neighbours saw them an hour later, when he called her to hand him out the tin of sheep-raddle off the dresser. She handed it up to him as he sat on the blue cart and she laughed at the way the horse rattled his trappings restlessly.

They looked a far finer pair than Oliver and Kathleen had ever looked. Kathleen was anæmic and thin-boned. Oliver and Sarah were peasants. They had the same quick gestures and warm colouring, and the same curious gold eyes. She handed him up the tin of raddle and Oliver looked down and laughed.

"Did you rub the raddle on your cheeks?" he said, when he saw the rough colour that stained her face.

She put up a bare arm and wiped it across her face, the

healthy red deepened with capricious temper. But she laughed again when he went down the road, and she watched him till the cart had rattled out of earshot, in the distance, where it looked no more than a toy cart, with a toy horse and a still young farmer made out of painted wood.

Kathleen came home on the following Friday. Her house was cleaner than it had ever been before. The boards shone white. The windows glinted. There was bread cooling on the window sill, and the step outside the door was whitened with lime. She paid Sarah, and Sarah went home. Her brothers were glad to have her back again. She gave them the money. They were glad to have her cook good wholesome food again, and wash and scrub again.

Her children were glad to have her home again too. They were getting big and their uncles were making them work, piling turf, and running after the sheep like collie dogs.

Sarah worked hard for a few months, and one night, as she handed round the potato cakes at supper, her elder brother took a sharp look at her.

"For God's sake," he said to the younger brother, "for God's sake! Will you look at her!"

Sarah tossed her hair back and sat down. She ate her supper and drank two big cups of tea.

"I'm going out," she said, and went out the door into the wagon-blue evening light. Her going was nonchalant and independent, and her slow gait had a strange rhythmical grace.

When she was gone the brothers shuffled their feet and exchanged looks.

"Did you see her? Did you see her?" said Pat. "Holy God, but something has got to be done about her this time."

"Ah! What the hell is the use of talking like that? What's to be done? Tell me that! What's to be done? If the country is full of blackguards, what can we do about it?"

"I thought the talking the priest gave her the last time would put some sense into her. He said to me that a Home was the only place for the like of her, but I told him that we'd not have any part in putting her away. Wasn't that right? Wasn't that right? Sure my God, what would we do without her here? You must have a woman in the house.

And the brats need their mother with them till they go to work, although that won't be long now. They're shaping into fine strong boys. Still, I must give the priest some answer."

"Tell him you can get no right of her atall, and let him tackle the job himself. I suppose it won't be long till he sees for himself. It's a good job the Kedrigans didn't notice her, or they'd never have given her an hour's work over there."

"How could they have noticed anything? Wasn't that over six months ago?"

"Pat . . ."

"Well?"

"Oh nothing, nothing. Nothing at all!"

"Can't you quit your hinting and speak out?"

"I'm only wondering . . . Who do you think is the father?"

"When you didn't know the father of the last one you're not likely to know the father of this one."

"The priest said that if she didn't tell him the name of the father he'd make the child able to talk, and make it name the guilty man."

"How well he didn't do it after all! Sarah was careful not to let him get a sight of the child till the whole thing was put to the back of his mind with the thoughts of laying the foundation-stone of the school! She can do the same with this one, then," said Pat, rising up and hitting his pipe against the chimney piece. "I'm going across to the quarry field to see if the heifer is all right. When Sarah comes back tell her to have the butter ready for Mick Grady to take up to Dublin in the morning."

"I won't mention anything else, of course?"

"What would you be mentioning? What is there to mention?" he said. "Won't it all be beyond saying in a few more weeks, when everyone in the village will see for themselves?"

"I suppose you're right. Well, come back, and I'll give you a hand bringing in the heifer if she's in a bad way."

"Ah, the heifer'll be all right."

Sarah went out every night after that, when dusk began to crouch over the valley, and her brothers kept silent tongues in their heads about the child she was carrying. She worked better than ever before and she sang at her work. She carried the child deep in her body and she had a strange primitive

grace in her rounded figure. She did not lose one shred of her tawny feline beauty, and she faced the abashed congregation at last Mass every Sunday. She walked halfway down the aisle and went to her usual place, in the fifth pew, under the third Station. Mrs. Kedrigan was expecting the long-delayed heir in a few weeks' time too, but she didn't go to Mass. The priest came to the house to her. She was looking bad, and she crept from chair to chair around the house, and at night she went out for a bit of a walk in the dark on the back road. She was bloodless and self-conscious. Her nerves were getting badly frayed, and Oliver used to have to sit up half the night and hold her moist palms in his until she fell asleep; but she was frightened and petulant and, in bursts of hysteria, she called Oliver a cruel brute.

One evening she was drinking a drop of tea, made by a gossipmonger, who called in to inquire for her health. She had just had a bad scene with Oliver, and he had gone down to the Post Office to see if there was any letter from the Maternity Hospital in Dublin, where she had engaged a bed for the next month. When he came back he had a letter in his hand, but he waited till they were alone before he gave it to her. Before he gave it to her, he told her what was in it. It was an anonymous letter and it had named him as the father of the child Sarah Murray was going to bring into the world in a few weeks' time. He told Kathleen it was an unjust accusation.

Kathleen took the letter, and when she had read it, she threw it on the floor. Two unusual spots of colour came into her cheeks.

"For God's sake, say something!" said Oliver. "You don't believe the bloody letter, do you?"

Kathleen didn't answer, and the red spots grew more hectic in her cheeks.

"You don't believe it, Katty? You don't believe it, do you?" And he went down on his knees and put his head in her lap. "What am I to do, Katty?"

"You'll do nothing," said Kathleen, speaking for the first time. "You'll do nothing. Aren't you innocent? Take no notice of that letter."

She stooped with a grotesque gesture and picked up the

letter. She put it under a plate on the dresser and began to get the tea ready with slow tedious journeying back and forth across the silent kitchen. Oliver stood over the fire for a little while, and once or twice he looked at his wife with suspicion and curiosity.

"I'll take the letter," he said at last, walking to the dresser.

"You'll do nothing of the kind," said Kathleen, and she took it out from under the plate. "This is where that letter belongs."

There was a sharp sound of crackling and a paper ball went into the heart of the flames. Oliver watched it burning, and although he thought it odd that he didn't see the writing on it as it burned, he still believed that it was his letter that was curling into black scrolls in the grate.

The very next morning Sarah was sitting by the fire as Kathleen had been sitting by her fire. She was drinking a cup of tea, and she didn't look up when her brothers came in. No one spoke and Sarah began to get up. Her brother Pat pushed her down on the chair again. The tea slopped over the floor. The cup shattered against the range.

"Is this letter yours? Did you write it?" said the older brother, holding out a letter addressed to Oliver Kedrigan that had gone though the post and been opened. "Did you write this letter?"

"What business is it of yours?" asked Sarah, trying to rise again.

"Sit down, I tell you," said Pat, pressing her back. "Can't you answer my question? Did you write this letter?"

Sarah stared dully at the letter. The yellow-brown eyes flickered fire.

"Give it to me," she snarled, and she snatched it out of his hand. "What business is it of yours, you thief?"

"Did you hear that?" the younger man shouted. "Did you hear that? She called you a thief, did you hear that?"

"Shut up, you," said Pat to the other man. "And answer me this you," said he, shaking the girl: "It is true what it says in this letter?"

"How do I know what it says in the letter, and what if it is true? Is it any business of yours?"

"I'll show you whose business it is," Pat said, and he ran

into the room, off the kitchen. He came out with an armful of clothes, a red dress, a brown coat, and a few odd garments. Sarah watched him, fascinated. He ran into the kitchen and looked at his sister and then he looked around the room in hesitation. Suddenly he saw the open door into the yard and he ran towards it. He threw out the armful of clothing and ran back into the room. He came out with a few more things in his arms and a red cap. He threw them out the door, too.

"Do you know it's raining?" said the younger brother.

"What do I care if it's raining?"

He went in again. He came out with a picture frame and a box of powder and a little green velvet box stuck all over with pearly shells.

"Oh! Give me my box! Give me my green box." Sarah sprang to life after her long immobility.

The other brother was impelled into action too.

"Go after it if you want it," he shouted and pushed her out into the rain. She fell on the wet slab stone of the doorway, and the brothers shut out the sight from their eyes by banging the door closed.

"That ought to teach her," said one. "Carrying on with a married man! No one is going to say I put up with that kind of thing. I didn't mind the first time, when it was a rich man like old Molloy, that could pay for his mistakes, but I wasn't going to stand for a thing like this."

"You're sure it was Kedrigan?"

"Ah, sure, didn't you see the letter yourself? Wasn't it her writing, and didn't Mrs. Kedrigan herself give it to me this morning?"

"She denied it, Pat."

"She did and so did he, I suppose. Well, she can deny it somewhere else now."

"I suppose she'll go down to the Gilroys?"

"Let her go where she bloody well likes, and shut your mouth, you. If it wasn't for you wanting the money for the harness she wouldn't have gone near Kedrigans' in the first place. Keep away from that window. Can't you sit down? Sit down, can't you!"

All this took place at nine o'clock on a Tuesday night. The next morning at eleven o'clock, Oliver Kedrigan came from a

fair in another town, home across the fields. He called in from the yard to his wife.

"Kathleen! Hand me out the raddle. It's on top of the dresser."

Kathleen Kedrigan came to the door and she had the raddle in her hand.

"You won't be troubled with any more letters," she said.

Oliver laughed self-consciously. "That's a good thing, anyhow," he said. "Give me the raddle."

Kathleen held the tin of red marking in her hand, but she didn't move. She leaned against the jamb of the door.

"I see you didn't hear the news?"

"What news?"

"Sarah Murray got what was coming to her last night. Her brothers turned her out of the house, and threw out all her things after her."

Oliver's eyes darkened.

"That was a cruel class of thing for brothers to do. Where did she go?"

"She went where the like of her belongs; into the ditch on the side of the road!"

Oliver said nothing, but his limbs stiffened with resentment. His wife watched him closely and she clenched her hands.

"You can spare your sympathy. She won't need it."

Oliver looked up.

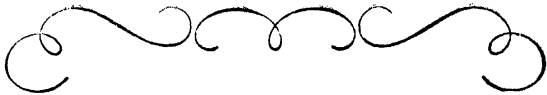
"Did she stay out all night in the rain?"

"She did," said Kathleen, and she stared at him. "At least that's where they found her in the morning, as dead as a rat, and the child dead beside her!"

Her pale eyes held him. His own eyes stared uncomprehendingly into them. She began to move back into the house away from his stare. He looked down at her hand that held the tin of red sheep-raddle.

"Give me the raddle!" he said, and before she had time to hand it to him he repeated it, again and again, frantically.

"Give me the raddle. Give it to me. Hurry, will you! Give me the God-damn' stuff."



Brother Boniface



Brother Boniface sat in the sun. The sun shone full on the monastery wall, and brightened the gold coins of its ancient lichen. It fell full on the rough stone seat where Brother Boniface sat smiling. It fell through the leaves of the elm trees and littered the grass with its yellow petals. It splattered the green and white palings that shut off the kitchen garden from the blazing flower beds on the lawn.

There was no one to be seen out under the hot midday sun but Brother Boniface and the monastery cats. There were five cats. There was a great yellow fellow, stretching his long paws up the bark of an elm. He had green eyes. There was an old white cat sitting in the grass. He kept his eyes shut tight against the piercing sun rays. There were two fat cats abask on the stone seat, one each side of Brother Boniface. And there would have been a great peace over the sunny place had it not been for the fifth cat. The fifth cat was very young. She was pretty and slender and she ran among the grasses. Her fur was grey with markings of gold. Her eyes were amber-yellow. She ran at the waving grasses. She ran at the falling leaves. She caught at the flies in the air. She ran at the splatters of sunlight and pinned them against the palings with her paw. Brother Boniface watched her for a little while, but when he saw the other cats with their great eyes closing every few minutes, blinking and narrowing and closing, his own eyelids began to grow heavy and he fell into a little sleep.

Brother Boniface was sleeping lightly, with his chin in his cowl, when a cinnamon-coloured butterfly, with black and brown spots on its wings, flew unsteadily into the sunlight and went towards the blazing flowers. At once the young grey cat

sprang after it, leaping lightly through the grass and springing after the butterfly into the very centre of the laden flower bed. Under her weight the flower stems snapped and broke. The fat cats opened their eyes. The white cat sat up. Brother Boniface jerked his head upwards and looked from right to left. When he saw the bent stems of the lovely blossoms he rose up unsteadily to his feet and clapped his hands together, and shuffled the gravel with his sandalled feet and called out to the cat:

"Pussy! Pussy! Pussy! Come out of that at once!"

He waved his arms in distress.

"Pussy! Pussy! Pussy! Come out of that at once!"

The young cat started up with a pretty fright. She laid her ears back against her sleek grey head and she arched her back fantastically. She looked at Brother Boniface and forgot the cinnamon butterfly, who fluttered away through the grass. She looked at him while he waved his arms and soon she slackened the arch of her body and pricked up her ears once more, and then she leaped out of the flower plot and ran after a splatter of sun petals; capricious, giddy, but full of grace.

Brother Boniface stood in the sun for a while and watched her as she went away, scrambling from shadow to shadow as the trees moved lightly in the breeze. His warm brown habit fell in heavy folds about him and seemed to tug at him with their weight. When he was a young monk he used to think that the folds of his sleeves and the folds of his cowl gave him an added speed as he strode the corridors, in the way that the sails of a ship speed it on before the wind, but at eighty he felt a weariness in the weight of the brown wool, although, in places, it was worn thin enough to be little more than a network of woollen threads. When the young cat disappeared around the bole of a tree, Brother Boniface went over and bent down to examine the broken flowers. He picked up three that were severed from their stems and he laid them gently on the grass border. There would be three flowers less before the great marble altar on the feast of Corpus Christi, and Brother Boniface was saddened at the thought. He was looking forward to the great feast day, when there would be a thousand candles blazing before the Host and a thousand flowers as well. Even three blossoms were a loss. He went back to his stone seat,

moving slowly over the smooth pebbles that made the pathway from the rectory to the chapel.

The pebbles on this path were all very smooth and round. They were smoothed over by the soles of a thousand sandalled feet, and every day they were carefully raked by Brother Gardener. Brother Gardener had come to join the order exactly ten years after Brother Boniface, and so Brother Boniface always looked upon him as a very young man, although Brother Gardener had been now fifty years in the garb of the order.

The day that Brother Gardener came up the driveway with a red carpet-bag in his hand, Brother Boniface was clipping the ivy on the chapel wall and the air was scented with the bitter green sap from its stems. The young man asked to see the Father Abbot, and Brother Boniface got down from the ladder and went around with him to the door of the Abbot's reception room. While they stood waiting for the Father Abbot to come out, they began to talk.

"You shouldn't cut ivy at this time of the year," said the young man, who had been a gardener in the world before he got the idea of entering a monastery.

Just as Brother Boniface was going to answer him the old Abbot, Brother Anselm—God be good to his soul—opened the door, and hearing the last sentence, joined in the conversation as if he had known the young man all his life.

"Will it grow again?" he asked.

"Nothing will stop ivy from growing, once it has started," said the young man, "but it looks better if it's clipped before the new growth has started for the year."

"I'm glad to know that," said the Abbot. "Still, we can't leave it the way it is now." He looked at the wall where there was a great grey patch of clipped twigs, and another great patch of hanging leaves that fluttered in the wind. He turned back to the young man and glanced at his red carpet-bag, and looked him straight in the eye for a minute, and then he spoke again.

"Leave your bag in the hall, young man," he said, "and finish clipping that ivy. See that you cut it at the right time next year," he paused, "and the year after, and every year," he said, and he took the shears out of Brother Boniface's hand and gave them to the new man.

"You can help Brother Sacristan to clean the brasses," he said to Boniface. That was the kind of man he was, Brother Anselm, God be good to his soul. And Brother Boniface was very fond of him.

The new young man was given the name of Jennifer, but it wasn't very long till he was known as Brother Gardener, in the same way that Brother Boas was called Brother Sacristan, and Brother Lambert was called Brother Vintner. But Brother Boniface always kept his own name because he never did anything well enough to be left at it for long. He was changed from one task to another. He cleaned the brasses and snuffed the candles. He sharpened the knives and he fed the chickens. He waxed the oak pews and he chopped pine logs for the fire. He peeled apples and turned the churn and in October every year he went out with a basket and picked the purple elderberries. Later he took the scum off the vats. He had a thousand tasks to do, and he loved doing them all. He helped with everything, and one day Father Abbot said that he should have been called Brother Jack, because he was Jack-of-all-trades.

But Father Abbot sent for Brother Boniface when he felt that his end had come, and although all the monks clustered round him, he wouldn't let anyone minister to him but Brother Boniface. It was Brother Boniface who wet his lips. It was Brother Boniface who held the crucifix up for him to kiss, and it was he who held the candle firm in the old man's hand when he finally freed his soul to God. And when the soul of the Abbot had fled its clay, the hands of the corpse and the hands of Brother Boniface were bound together by a twisted rope of wax that had knotted its way downward, drop by drop, from the candlewick to their clasped hands.

Every year when the ivy was cut, and its bitter scent freed upon the air, Brother Boniface thought of the past and he prayed for the old Abbot. There was very little time for thinking about the past, but it was still very vivid in Brother Boniface's mind. Memories stay greener where memories are few.

And as the old monk sat in the sun, basking in its warmth with the lovely indolent cats, he had the first hours of leisure that he ever had in his life, and he thought about the years that had fled. They had gone by swiftly one after another till it

seemed now as if they had been but a flight of swallows coming out one after another from under the eaves of the barn.

The earliest thing that Brother Boniface could remember was standing between his father's knees in a big wagonette with yellow leather cushions as it rolled along a road in the middle of the night. He had been on a picnic with his father and his mother, but he could only remember the ride home in the dark.

The brake was rolling along the roads, under the rustling poplar trees. The songs of the picnic party volleyed through the valley. The horse-hooves rang on the road. He, Barney, had never been out so late before. His mother hadn't wanted to bring him. She thought it would be bad for him to stay up so late. But his father had insisted on taking him. He said that he could sleep in the brake coming home.

But the brake, going home, had been the real enchantment for Barney and was the only part of the picnic that he remembered clearly. The rest of the day was only a broken memory of sun and trestle tables and people laughing and swaying from side to side on benches. He remembered a tall man pouring out lemonade from foaming bottles, and he remembered a lady with a green feather in her hat who kept telling him to run away and play like a normal child. But he could remember every moment of the drive home, along the darkening roads through the valleys. He remembered looking down over the sides of the brake at the travelling road, and he remembered his mother pulling him by the sleeve.

"Look up, Barney Boy," she said. "It will make you sick to lean down over the sides like that." So he looked up, and when he did the wonder of the world came upon him for the first time. As his head jerked up he saw a shower of brilliant sparks riding down through the skies, riding straight towards them it seemed, and he screamed with fear and excitement, and everyone in the party glanced their way.

"Oh, look! Look, Father," he shouted, as the gilt stars rode downwards towards him.

"Where?" said his father, looking up in fright. "What do you see?"

"Look," shouted Barney, and he pointed at the stars.

"Is it the stars you mean?" said his father, laughing, and looking around at the rest of the party.

"Is that what you call them?" said Barney. "Why are they up in the sky?"

"They're always in the sky," said his father. "You often saw them before." He looked around uneasily, hoping that no one was listening.

"Were they there last night?"

"I suppose they were."

"Why didn't I see them?"

"You were in bed."

"Were they there Sunday night?"

"They were. Now that's enough about them," said his father.

"When will I see them again?" said Barney, and his father slapped his hand on his knee.

"It will be many a long day before you see them again, if I have my way," he said, turning around and laughing with the lady who wore the green feather in her hat; and after that everyone began to laugh and they laughed for a long time, while the brake rolled along the road under the rustling poplar trees, and Barney stared upwards until his head began to reel.

After that every night he asked to be let stay up until the stars came out. But long before they rode out into the sky Barney was in bed, and although he tried hard to remain awake he was always asleep before the first of them rode forth. And so, in time, he forgot them. And when he went to school he learned, among other things, that it was silly to get excited about common things like stars and rainbows and whirls of wind, flowers and rain and drifts of snow. They were natural phenomena, the teacher said. And she spent two days teaching Barney how to spell the word phenomena, because Barney was backward at his books.

All the way along his school career, Barney was slow and it took him all his time to avoid being made the butt of the master's jokes. And only for one poor lad that was simple, he would have been always at the foot of his class. Of course, if he had had more time to look over his lessons he might have made more progress, but his father was a man who could not believe that any real work could be done sitting on a chair, and so Barney was more often helping in the shop than he was reading his books. His father kept him always on the move.

At nine o'clock he opened the shop, although no one ever came into it till long after ten. But between the time of taking down the lice-eaten shutters, and the entry of the first customer, there were a hundred things to be done. He had to sprinkle the floor with tea leaves to keep down the dust while he swept the floor. And often before he swept the floor he had to undo the twig of bound faggots and fasten them up tighter with a thong of leather.

One morning when he was sweeping out the dust into the gutter his father came out and saw that he had sprinkled tea leaves on the pavement as well. His father gave him a clout on the ear.

"Waste not, want not," his father said, and after that Barney had to be more attentive than ever.

Then sometimes there were large packing cases to be splintered open with a gimlet, and cups and saucers and statues and lamp globes to be taken out and counted, one by one, and the sticky tissue paper that wrapped them to be peeled off with a penknife. Then they had to be arranged on the shelves, and after that the sawdust had to be swept up, and the shavings picked out by hand from the cracks in the boards, and caried in to the kitchen fire without letting any fall. There was something to be done every minute, and on a Fair Day there was so much to be done that he had to stay at home from school.

On the morning of a Fair Day Barney had to be up at four o'clock, and out in front of the shop with a big ash plant in his hand to beat off the cattle that came too near the windows. The night before a Fair Day there were beer barrels rolled out to the front of the shop windows and boards were nailed across them to make a barrier, and to protect the plate glass; but all the same, Barney had to be there, because sometimes a beast was strong enough to break through the barrier and puck at the glass with his horns.

One terrible morning, when Barney stood with his stick in the dawn, a great red heifer gave a puck to the barrels and before Barney could raise his stick she had butted against the barrels with such force that the nails of the boards were lifted out and the boards rose up and crashed through the glass. That was the worst day in Barney's life. He stood in the grey

street while his father roared at him and the drovers all came up and gaped at the hole in the window. The cattle themselves were excited and they butted one another, backward and forward, some of them slipping on the dirty street and falling, while the men yelled at them and kicked their rumps and caused such confusion that Barney couldn't even hear the curses that were hurled at him.

But later in the morning when his mother stroked his head, and begged him to stop crying, and promised to ask his father to forgive him, Barney began to remember some of the things that had been shouted at him, and it seemed to him that, more than anything else his father had said, the thing that was the most terrible was the question he kept shouting: "Where are your eyes? Where are your eyes? Why weren't you looking at what you were doing? Where were your eyes? Why didn't you see the beast?"

And Barney was frightened because he couldn't remember looking at anything but the big red-chalked barrels, and the dry dusty boards, and the great steaming nostrils of the cattle. He had been looking at them all the time, and if he looked away it could only have been for a minute when a wisp of scarlet cloud floated out between the chimney of the barrack and the spire of the church. The cloud had only floated there for a moment, before it was blown out of sight, but it was such a strange and beautiful colour that Barney had stared at it. And when he cried with his head in his mother's lap it was not because he was beaten, but because he began to feel faintly that there was something odd about himself, and that ordinary successful people, people who were respected in the town, like his own father, would never be foolish enough to stand with their hands down by them, doing nothing, as he longed to do, for hours and hours, just staring at the trees or the grasses or the stars or the rains.

But if Barney himself was beginning to notice his difference from other young men of his age, his father was beginning to notice it too, and if it bewildered Barney, it had a more positive effect on his father. One night the merchant was coming back from the station late at night, where he had been lading crates of china, and he came upon Barney, who was leaning against the yard gate staring up into the sky. There was

nothing in the sky but the usual display of gaudy stars and the tinsel moon, and Barney's father was filled with rage against the stupidity of his only son.

"Are you getting soft in the head, I wonder?" he said as he pushed past him and went into the yard, and Barney could hear his voice through the kitchen window, as he told Barney's mother: "That son of ours is abroad at the gate," he said, "leaning up against the piers with his hands in his pockets and staring up into the sky like a half-wit. Can he never find anything to do for himself without being driven?"

"Leave him alone," said his mother. "You drive him too much as it is. You're always yelling at him, and sending him here and sending him there. He never gets a moment to rest his poor feet."

"He's not resting his feet out there, gaping up at the sky," said his father, and then Barney heard his heavy steps on the stairs, and he knew that his mother was alone. He looked around him once more at the strange splendour of the heavens, and he looked around at the dark town where every window was shuttered and curtained and he shivered suddenly, partly because of the cold night air and partly because of the great loneliness that he felt in his heart when he thought of his difference from other men. Even from his own warm-hearted mother he felt a difference that made him dread going in to the lighted kitchen where she would be waiting for him. But he opened the door and went inside.

"Are you cold? Sit over here by the fire," his mother said, looking at him sharply, and pulling a hard chair across the tiles with a clattering sound that jarred his nerves.

"What were you doing out there in the dark by yourself?" she said.

"Nothing," said Barney, and he felt her glance upon him although he was staring into the flames.

"People will think you're daft if you stand about like that gaping at the stars," she said, and he felt that there was a questioning tone in her voice, and that she was asking for an explanation rather than giving advice. He knew that the slightest explanation would have won her over to be his champion, but the feelings that drove him out into the starlight were too vague to be expressed even in thought, much less in speech.

They remained mere feelings, drawing him out of doors, drawing him into silent places, drawing him away from his fellows.

His mother put her hands on her hips. She felt rebuffed.

"It's true for your father," she said. "You must be getting soft in the head. I don't know what kind of a person you are at all. But I know one thing! The devil makes work for idle hands to do! That's an old saying and it's a true one." She picked up a candle and went out into the hall with her head held high and her lips pursed together with annoyance, but as she went upstairs she leaned down over the banisters and watched him for a few minutes where he sat by the fire. He knew she was watching him, and his perplexity deepened and darkened his soul. He wanted to please his parents, but every hour that passed was bringing him a surer knowledge that their way of life was small and mean and that there must be a way of life that would leave time for glorying in the loveliness of field and flower and in the blazonry of stars.

After the night that his father found him gazing into vacancy, Barney was given more to do than ever he had been given before, and even at evening time, when the shopboys were gone off to the ball-alley to play handball, or off with their girls to walk on the old town ramparts, Barney was often sent out into the country on his bicycle to deliver some parcel that might easily have been delivered the next day. They were determined to keep him from idling. They were determined to keep him moving.

But although for a long time there seems to be something vague and indecisive about our destiny, after a certain point has been reached it is often clear not only that there was a continuous progress, but that events which seemed at first to impede are later seen to have facilitated it. So, riding along the country roads on messages that were intended to keep him from strange dreaming, at every new delight of nature along the way he was forced to wonder more and more how it was that all the men he knew spent their leisure hours as drearily as their working hours, and only exchanged the stuffiness of the storehouse for the stuffiness of the billiard room.

At first when he went into the country lanes Barney was little better than a city man, exclaiming at the blatant beauties

that paraded more brazenly in the hedgerows, the powdery hawthorn and the rambling honeysuckle. But after a time he grew in knowledge of the secrets and subtleties of nature, and he passed by the blossoming trees almost heedlessly and went into the deeps of the fields to seek out the secret scents that are released from the grass when the heavy cattle tread it down. And it was in the very depths of a pasture at evening, with the heavy cattle standing idle beside him in the clover, that he vowed to evade the way of life that had been destined for him by his father and his mother.

At first his pale rebellious dreams merely freed him from the dread of spreading his life behind the dusty counters of the shop; but he soon realized that he must choose an alternative way of earning his bread, and he set out to choose the one that would allow him to appreciate the qualities of the earth. From then on he began to wander around the town and take an interest, for the first time, in the rest of the townspeople. He spent many stolen hours walking around the town, in such apparent search for something that people came out into the road, after he had turned the corner, and furtively shuffled a foot in the gutter in the hope of some anonymous gain. But Barney was only looking for an idea. He stood at the great dark doorway of the smithy and watched the sparks threading up the flue. He stood at the door of the livery stable in the east side of the town and watched the horses with their trembling withers, while they were groomed and soothed by the stable-boys. There were strange dappled roans, strawberry and grey, and there were bays and chestnuts that were dappled with their own sweat. He watched the farmers bringing home the goodlihead of golden grain. He watched at the doors of shops that were bigger than his father's, and the only real difference that he could see between them was that the big shops were noisier than his father's and had more spits on the floor.

One evening, just before the last of the light went out of the sky, Barney saw a man sowing seeds in the last few furrows of his field. The picture that he made against the darkening skies of evening was one that startled Barney and made him think for a moment that he had found the beautiful life at last. But as he came nearer he saw that although the tall man made a picture of great grandeur as he stood out against the skies with

his raised arm flinging the unseen seed, he himself was unaware of the grandeur of the scene, because he never lifted his eyes higher than the hand he swung in the air, tossing the grain, before he groped in his bag for another fistful. And realizing this, Barney stepped back from the top of the ditch where he had been standing in a trance, and went away in sadness.

His sadness deepened as he walked along the road; for it seemed to him that whether you cobbled or whether you hammered, whether you measured up rice in a scales or whether you led a young colt round and round in a training ring, or whether you opened or closed your hand to let fall a shower of seeds, you had to keep your eyes upon what you were doing, and soon you forgot that there was a sky over you and grass under your feet, and that flowers blew for your delight and birds sang in the bushes all day long.

At last Barney settled down to follow the life his father had planned for him, and he let his mother buy him a yellow canvas coat to keep his trousers clean when he would be weighing out whiting or weed-killer that might put dust on his clothes. And everyone said that he was shaping out much better than they would have expected. The canvas coat kept the dust from getting on Barney's trousers; but there was dust getting into his mind, and soon he would have been using half a sheet of paper instead of a whole sheet, and weighing the whiting in the bag to make weight, and it is probable that in no time at all he would have been taking down the shutters from the windows five minutes before eight in the hope of catching another penny. Just before he had relinquished the last shreds of his dream, however, a message came down from the Abbot of the monastery that was situated outside the town, to know if the monks could be supplied with a gallon of colza oil three times a week.

"There's no need for you to go with it, Barney," said his father, "I'll send one of the boys"—because he was anxious not to impose too much on Barney at the moment when he was beginning to show some taste for money-making.

"I think I should go myself," said Barney. "I might arrange to supply them with candles as well."

His father took the yellow coat out of his hand.

"I'll hang that up for you, my boy," he said, and he saved Barney two or three steps across the shop, calling back as he

hung up the coat on a nail behind the door, "Take your tea before you go. It's a long push on a bicycle out to that monastery, and as well as I remember there's a rise on the road most of the way."

There was a rise on the road, and Barney was so tired by the time he reached the monastery gate that he left the bicycle at the gate lodge and began to walk up the avenue. The night was coming down gently between the dark yews and cypress trees, and a scent of flowers rose from some hidden place behind the walls. But Barney's mind was filled with thoughts of the interview with the monks, and he was planning what he would say to the monk who would open the door.

It was an old monk who came to the door, and he seemed to be deaf. He took the can from Barney and he looked out past him through the open door, and then he pointed to a hard oak seat in the hall, and told him to wait for the can. He went away down a corridor and left Barney sitting all alone in the bare hallway with the yellow waxed floor, and he felt very young all of a sudden. He began to look around him. There were high-pointed windows, and through them he saw the high pointed stars, and they reminded him of something far away and indistinct in his childhood but he could not know what it was exactly. It was something sad and beautiful, and it was something that he had lost a long time ago. And he began to wonder why it was that the memory came back to him now; and then he noticed that the windows were without any curtains, and his thoughts raced away on another speculation; and it seemed to him suddenly that of all the silly things in the world the silliest was hanging heavy curtains across the windows to blot out the glory of the night with its sky and its moon and its welter of stars.

The old man came back with the empty oil-can. Barney took it silently and went out into the dark. There was no sound but the closing of the door, and he thought of all the foolish words that another man would have wasted upon the simple transaction. He is a wise old man, Barney thought, and he wondered about him as he went down the driveway.

Halfway down the avenue there was a great sycamore tree, and when Barney had nearly passed by it he saw that under its great shade of leaves there was a young monk standing;

and there was such a strange stillness in his standing figure that Barney turned around when he had gone a few paces farther and looked back at him. His face was turned upwards to the stars, and his hands were lifted in adoration of their Creator. Barney tilted up his head too, and it was all that he could do to keep himself from falling upon his knees.

All that night and all next day he thought about the young man with his face tilted to the stars, and at the end of the second night he knew that his own eyes had been blinded for ever to the gross glare of tawdry coins and the gaudy pattern of bank notes. The only change that others could see in him was that his yellow overall was getting a bit short in the sleeves.

One night soon afterwards Barney's father was wakened in the night, and he thought that he heard rats down below in the shop. He came down in his nightshirt with a spluttering candle stuck in a bottleneck. The counters were piled with carefully weighed bags of whiting and weed-killer, red lead, tacks, and grass seed. There was enough weighed out to last all winter, and when his father asked Barney why he had weighed out so much he was almost relieved at hearing the answer, because he had thought, when he first looked around at the laden counters, that his son's sudden interest in business had sent him out of his mind.

Next evening Barney took an old fibre suitcase belonging to his mother, put a few things in it, and tied it to the back of the bicycle.

"I'll send one of the boys up to bring back the bicycle."

"You can take back the case too," said Barney. "I won't need it after to-day."

His mother wiped her eyes on the corner of the tea cloth that she held in her hand.

"Are you sure you'll be contented, Barney, inside those big walls?"

"Remember there's only seven acres, all told, timber and pasture, inside those walls," said his father. "It's a small place to pass the whole of your days."

But Barney had a vision before his mind of the great starry expanse of sky over the walled garden, and he thought of the shivering elms, and the deep grasses where the wind raced; and it seemed that the monastery garden was as wide and spacious

as the world because there men had time to meditate and dwell on the beauties the Lord had laid open to their eyes.

The evening that he arrived he found out that the monastery itself was as big as a city, and that it took five or ten minutes to go from one end of it to another, and that three lengths of the corridor were equal to half a mile. He was shown over the whole place by a young lay brother recently joined himself, and when they came back to the place where they had started out from, the arches of his instep were aching and he could hardly believe that it was nine o'clock.

Nine o'clock would have seemed a ridiculous hour to retire at, but Barney was so tired, and his feet ached so much, he was glad to lie down. He meant to get up later in the evening and look out of the thin pointed windows of his cell, at the dark garden where the birds defied the silence with their song.

In the middle of the night Barney sat up in bed when there was a knocking on the door, and he sprang to the floor when he saw the light of a licking flame through the great windy cracks in the door. He dashed to the door and he opened it wide, to rush out; but a dash of holy water, chill and sudden, cooled his fright, and he saw that the flame was from a candle in the lay brother's hand.

Dominus vobiscum . . .

The young Brother Boniface joined the thronging feet that went down the stone steps to the chapel; and the knocking of the wooden rosary beads, and the sliding of the sandals from step to step, and the jostling movement of the heavy worsted habits made him forget that it was night and gave every appearance of daytime.

When the real daytime came at last and the birds began to fly out from under the chapel eaves, Brother Boniface was set the task that always fell to the latest member of the order, and that was peeling potatoes. It took a lot of potatoes to feed seventy-two monks, specially when they didn't eat meat with them. But it didn't take long to eat them. Brother Boniface was used to eating quickly, and so he would have been finished as soon as anyone, but he was so interested in the gospel story that the Brother Lector was reading during the meal that he had to hurry at the end in order not to be last.

There was community prayer after the midday meal, and

after that there was recreation, but on that particular day there was an important visitor coming to see the monastery, and the Abbot wanted all the community to be present in the hall to receive her. She didn't arrive at the time she had arranged. In fact she came so late that they had only seventeen minutes for supper; and they had a great rush to make up the time, and clear away the meal and lay the table for breakfast, before the great bell rang out the hour of evening prayers. And that night an old monk died. He had lingered longer than anyone could have imagined, and even at the end his soul lingered among the candle flames and candle shadows while the monks knelt around him in prayer. Boniface had never seen anyone dying before. Death made a great impression on him. That night he had a few minutes of freedom and he went out into the cool garden that was dampened with rain, but afterwards when he tried to remember whether the stars had come out or not, and whether the birds had been singing or not, he could not remember anything about the time he had been in the garden. He had been thinking of death, and the shadows it cast upon life.

There was a very wet week after that, and during wet weather there were a great many things to be done indoors. Corridors were waxed and passageways were distempered, and the benches and pews were carefully examined to see that they were free from wood-lice. But on the evening of the seventh day there was a bright starry sky and Brother Boniface went out for a few minutes. He walked away to the right a few paces and then he saw that he was getting near the sycamore tree that stood by the gate. He remembered the young monk he had seen standing under it with his head tilted to the stars that pricked the dark greenery with their thin light. The monk was there. Brother Boniface had not yet made his acquaintance. He stepped into the damp grass and went across to the tree. But as he drew near he saw that the young monk's eyes were closed and that his lips were moving. And Boniface knew that he was saying his office, and not looking at the stars at all. And he remembered that he himself had not said his office yet, and he raised his eyes to heaven and began to say it, where he stood, under the sycamore tree, in the damp evening grasses, with the stars blazing brightly above all. But

he soon found that he could not pray with open eyes. The stars distracted him too much. He closed his eyes, and when he opened them again the curfew bell was ringing and the sky was overcast.

The year went flashing by, and Boniface did not feel it passing. When his father came up the avenue to see him he was often hoeing in a field and did not see him, so intent was he on his work. And when his father called out his name—"Barney! Barney!"—the other monks had to pluck him by the sleeve and tell him that someone was calling him, because Brother Boniface had almost forgotten that he had once answered to the name of Barney.

Life went flashing by the monastery, leaves and petals were blown past the uncurtained windows, trees tossed in the wind, and webs of rain were spun across the glass. The skies shook out their gay confetti of stars. Brother Boniface stepped into his sandals some twenty thousand mornings, and the days slipped by so fast that one fine morning he was eighty years old.

On the morning that Brother Boniface was eighty he was coming out of the bakehouse with a trough of dough that he had kneaded for Brother Breadmaker, and he met the monastery doctor in the middle of the courtyard.

"Good morning, Brother Boniface. You get younger every day," said the young doctor, looking at him closely and watching after him when he went on his way. The doctor turned his feet and went back to the Abbot's room.

"I met Brother Boniface in the yard," he said, to the young monk who was Abbot, and who was a personal friend of his, "and I didn't like the way the veins on his forehead were swollen. He was carrying a heavy tray of dough. He does too much for a man of his age."

"He loves work," said the Abbot.

"That is the kind of person who needs rest most. He must be forced to take life easier."

"I will see that he is released from some of his duties," said the Abbot.

"That is not enough," said the doctor. "He must be freed from all of his duties. He must sit out there in the sun, and remain as quiet as possible."

"Poor Boniface," said the young men, both together, as they stood at the low casement window of the Abbot's room and looked out at Brother Boniface, who was going across the grass with a saucer of milk, followed by five cats who ran in front of him and circled around him and lifted themselves up on their hind legs to caress him with the back of their necks.

"You can't call that hard work?" said the Abbot.

"Any work that never ceases is hard work," said the doctor.

"I'll send him out to-morrow morning to sit in the sun and I won't let him inside the door till night-time, except for his meals and prayers."

Brother Boniface took the sun like the monastery cats. He sat on the sunny seat, and smoothed down the folds of his warm brown habit. He smiled and he followed the ballet of the butterflies. The cats sometimes slit open their lazy eyes and gazed into the grass, where glossy jet insects ran up the green blades and bent them with their weight.

Brother Boniface sat in the sun and thanked the Lord that he had been led into the shade of life so safely. And he began to wonder how he had merited such happy anchorage. He tried to remember what it was that had first turned his mind to the cloister. He remembered the shop where he scattered tea leaves to keep down the dust. He remembered that he wore a yellow coat and that it got too short in the sleeves. He remembered stealing into the centres of the fields and breathing the fragrance of the trodden grass. He remembered riding in a black and yellow brake, under rustling poplar trees, while voices volleyed in the valley and the stars showered down through the sky. But for a long time he could not remember why he had left his home and come to the cloister. Then suddenly he slapped his hand on his knee and he laughed so loud the cats sprang up and arched their backs. When they saw they had nothing to fear they relaxed again, but they walked away to a more quiet place with disdainful hips and fastidious paws.

Brother Boniface continued to laugh, in short indolent chuckles. He realized that he had entered the monastery in order to have more time to meditate upon the glories of the earth, and that his life had circled round, from matin to lauds, from daylight to starlight, with greater speed than it could

possibly have sped by in the world. It had gone by so fast that he could hardly tell what colour the trees were and whether the stars were blue or green. And he looked up and kept looking up till his eyes ached from the brilliance of the blue sky, because he was filled with joy to think that now, at the end of his days, having earned his leisure honestly, he would at last be able to spend long hours in appreciation. He stared upwards again. The leaves of the elms spread out wide over him till he fancied the sky was green. Just then there was the sound of a snapping stem and Brother Boniface looked down. The grey cat sprang out of the flower bed when she saw him move, but a great yellow dahlia lay broken on the grass. Brother Boniface clapped his hands at the cat and went over to the flowers, but at the same time there was a light step on the gravel and the young Abbot came down the path with an agile gait and flowing sleeves and a cowl that filled up with wind as he walked and gave him the weighty appearance of an elderly man, although he was the youngest Abbot that had ever been chosen.

"Good morning, Brother Boniface," he said, as he stooped and lifted up the broken dahlia. "What will we do with those cats? The feast of Corpus Christi is only a few days away and we must have every single flower we can get. I wish we could dispense with the cats, but there are unfortunately too many mice for that. Did you hear them behind the wainscoting in the chapel this morning?" He bent and examined the stems of one or two blossoms that seemed a little lopsided.

"What will we do?" he said, and he straightened up and looked around the garden thoughtfully. Then he snapped his fingers. "I know what we'll do," he said, and he ran across the grass to the low casement window of the refectory, and he brushed aside the strands of ivy and opened the window.

"Brother Almoner!" he called out, in a clear gay voice. "Hand me out a paper bag."

Brother Almoner could be heard shuffling around on the tiles, and pulling out drawers and opening cupboards, and then he came to the window and handed out a stiff tinfoil tea-bag, open at the mouth.

The young Abbot came striding back across the grass, and when he reached the gravel path where the stone seat was set he bent down and gathered up a handful of pebbles. He threw

them into the tinfoil tea-bag and nimbly bent to gather up another handful, and another. Then, when the bag was filled to the top with smooth grey pebbles, he set it down on the rough stone seat beside Brother Boniface. "Here is a little job for you, Brother," he said. "You can do it without standing up, without moving an inch. Every time you see the cats going near the flowers, all you have to do is take up a little pebble and throw it at them to frighten them away. We must have a gorgeous blaze of flowers on the altar for Corpus Christi. Isn't that right?"

Brother Boniface took up the tea-bag full of stones.

"I'll keep it in my lap," he said.

"I'm delighted that we have you out here," said the Abbot. "Now I need not worry about the flowers. I know I can depend on you, Brother Boniface," he said, and he strode away again.

Brother Boniface sat in the sun. The Abbot's footsteps died away. There was no sound in Brother Boniface's ears but the bells of silence ringing. A brilliant red insect crawled up a blade of grass. The blade bent. Boniface watched him. The blade was weighted down till the insect was almost on a level with the ground. He put out a feeler and caught at another blade of grass that was short and stiff and seemed to stab the air, it went up so straight. The insect began to crawl upwards. The blade began to bend. Boniface bent down. He wondered where the insect was heading for that he took such a dangerous and devious path. And he felt the full luxury of indolence in realizing the triviality of his occupation. He was excited. He clasped his hands and bent closer to the grass.

Just then there was a sound of dry stems snapping, and Brother Boniface looked up in dismay. The young grey cat was in among the blossoms once more. The blossoms were breaking and falling to the ground. Three white butterflies flew among the leaves and the young cat sprang at each of them in turn.

"Pussy! Pussy! Pussy!" shouted Brother Boniface.

"Pussy! Pussy! Pussy! Come out of that at once!" And he groped for a pebble in his tinfoil bag, and stamped his feet at the grey and gold cat.

"Pussy! Pussy! Pussy! Come out of that at once!"

And years and years after, when Brother Boniface was laid

away in the close and secretive clay, the young monks who entered the monastery were told about his industry. They were told that he was never, never idle for a moment. They were very impressed, and they strove to follow his example. And they in turn told younger men when they themselves were old. And the part of the story that the old monks liked best to tell, and the young monks liked best to hear, was about the last days of Brother Boniface, when he was so old he couldn't even hear the bells of silence in his ears. Because then he was busiest of all. Day long, and day long, his voice could be heard, as he guarded the flowers for the feast of Corpus Christi by keeping the cats from breaking their stems.

“Pussy! Pussy! Pussy! Come out of that at once!”



At Sallygap



The red-and-white bus climbed up the hilly roads on its way, through the Dublin Mountains, to the town of Enniskerry. On either side the hedges were so high and heavy that the passengers had nothing more interesting to look at than each other, but after a short time the road became steeper than before. Then the fields that had been hidden by hedges were all bared to view, and slanted smoothly downward to the edge of the distant city.

Dublin was all exposed. The passengers told each other that you could see every inch of it. They would certainly see every church steeple and every tower. But, had they admitted as much, they would have said that the dark spires and steeples that rose up out of the blue pools of distance below looked little better than dark thistles rising up defiantly in a gentle pasture.

The sea that circled this indistinct city seemed as grey and motionless as the air. Suddenly, however, it was seen that the five-o'clock mail boat, looking little better or bigger than a child's toy boat, was pushing aside the plastery waves and curving around the pier at Dunlaoghaire on its way to the shores of England.

"There she goes!" said Manny Ryan to the young man in the grey flannel suit who shared the bus seat with him. "The fastest little boat for her size in the whole of the British Isles."

"What time does it take her to do the crossing?" asked the young man.

"Two hours and five minutes," said Manny, and he took out a watch and stared at it. "It's 3.39 now. She's out about four minutes, I'd say. That leaves her right to the dot. She'll dock at Holyhead at exactly 5.40."

"She's dipping a bit," said the young man. "I suppose she's taking back a big load after the Horse Show."

"That's right. I saw by the paper this morning she took two thousand people across yesterday evening."

"You take a great interest in things, I see."

"I do. That's quite right for you! I take a great interest indeed, but I have my reasons. I have my reasons."

Manny put his elbow up against the ledge of the window and turned on his side in the tight space of the seat, so that he was almost facing his companion, who, having no window ledge to lean upon, was forced to remain with his profile to Manny while they were talking.

"You wouldn't think now," said Manny, "just by looking at me, that I had my choice to sail out of Dublin on that little boat one day, and I turned it down! You wouldn't think that now, would you?"

"I don't know so much about that," said the young man, uncomfortably. "Many a man goes over to Holyhead, for one class of thing or another."

But it was clear by his voice that he found it hard to picture Manny, with his shiny black suit and his bowler hat, in any other city but the one he had lately left in the bus. So strong was his impression that Manny was, as he put it to himself, a Dubliner-coming-and-going, that he hastened to hide his impression by asking what business Manny had in Holyhead, if that wasn't an impertinence? He forgot apparently that Manny had never actually gone there, but Manny forgot that too in his haste to correct the young man on another score altogether.

"Is it Holyhead?" he asked in disgust. "Who goes there but jobbers and journeymen?"

"London?" asked the young man, raising his eyebrows.

"Policemen and servant girls," said Manny impatiently.

"Was it to the other side altogether, sir?" said the young man, and the "sir" whistled through the wax in Manny's ears like the sweetest string of a harpsichord, touched with a clever quill.

"To the other side altogether is right," he said. "I was heading for Paris—gay Paree, as they call it over there—and I often wished to God I hadn't turned my back on the idea."

"Is it a thing you didn't go, sir?"

"Well, now, as to that question," said Manny, "I won't say yes and I won't say no, but I'll tell you this much; I had my chance of going away. That's something, isn't it? That's more than most can say, isn't it?"

"It is indeed. But if it's a thing that you didn't go, sir, might I make so bold as to ask the reason?"

"I'll tell you," said Manny, "but first I'll have to tell you why I was ever going at all."

He took out a sepia-coloured photograph from an old wallet and he held it over to the young man, who looked at it, holding it close to his face because it was faded in places and in other places the glaze was cracked. But he made out quite clearly all the same that the photograph showed a group of young men sitting stiffly on cane-back chairs, their legs rigid in pin-stripe trousers, their hair plastered back with oil, and their hands folded self-consciously over the awkward contours of trombones and fiddles and brassy cornets.

In the centre of the group, turned up on its rim, was a big yellow drum wearing a banner across its face with the words "Mary Street Band" printed on it in large block letters.

"That was us," said Manny, "the Mary Street Band. We used to play for all the dances in the city, and we played for the half-hour interval as well in the Mary Street Theatre."

He leaned over.

"That was me," he said, pointing to a young man with a fiddle on his knee, a young man who resembled him as a son might resemble a father.

"I'd recognize you all right," said the stranger, looking up at Manny's face and down again at the photograph. Both faces had the same nervous thinness, the same pointed jaw, and the same cleft of weakness in the chin. Only the eyes were different. The eyes in the photograph were light in colour, either from bad lighting on the part of the photographer or from the shallowness and pallor of immaturity. The eyes of the older Manny were dark. They held a dignity that might have come from sadness, but, wherever it came from, it was strangely out of keeping with the urgent respectability of his striped city suiting and his very slightly mildewed bowler hat.

"There was a party of us (the few lads you see there at the

back, and the one to the left of the drum) planning on getting out, going across to Paris and trying the dance halls over there—*palais*, they call them on the other side. We'd stuck together for three years, but these few lads I'm after pointing out to you got sick of playing to the Dublin jackeens. I got sick of it, too. They were always spitting out and sucking oranges and cat-calling up at the artistes. We heard tell it was different altogether across the water. Tell me this, were you ever in Paris, young fellow? 'Gay Paree,' I should be saying."

"No, I can't say that I was," said the young man.

"Man alive!" said Manny. "Sure that's the place for a young fellow like you. Clear out and go. That's my advice to you and I don't know who you are. Take it or leave it. That's my advice to you, although I don't know from Adam who you are or what you are. That's what I'd say to you if you were my own son. Cut and run for it."

Manny gave a loud sigh down the back of the lady in front, who shivered and drew her collar closer.

"Paris!" he said again, and sighed once more. "Paris, lit up all night as bright as the sun, with strings of lights pulling out of each other from one side of the street to the other, and fountains and bandstands every other yard along the way. The people go up and down linked, and singing, at any hour of the day or night, and the publicans—they have some other name on them over there, of course—are coming to the door every minute with aprons round their middle, like women, and sweeping the paths outside the door and finishing off maybe by swilling a bucket of wine over the path to wash it down."

"You seem to have a pretty good idea of it for a man who wasn't there!"

"I have a lot of postcards," said Manny, "and we were never done talking about it before ever we decided on going at all, myself and the lads. In the end we just packed up one night and said, 'Off with us! By the holy God, this is too much to take from any audience!' There had been some bit of a row that night at the theatre, and somehow or other an old dead cat got flung up on the stage. Did you ever hear the like of that for ignorance?"

"All I can say is, it's no wonder you packed your bags!" said the young man.

"Is it now?" said Manny. "That's what I say myself. My bags were all packed and strapped, and what was more, before very long they were halfway up the plank of that little boat you see pulling out there."

They looked out the bus window, down over the falling fields of the mountainside, to the sea and its vanishing boat.

"Is that right?" said the young man.

"That's right. My bags were on the gang-plank and there was Annie below on the quay, with the tears in her eyes. That was the first time I gave a thought to her at all. Annie is my wife. At least she is now. She wasn't then. I gave one look at her standing there in the rain (it was raining at the time) with her handkerchief rolled up in her hand ready to wave as soon as the boat got going. The porters were pushing past her with their truckloads of trunks and hitting up against her. Did you ever notice how rough those fellows are? Well, with the rain and the porters and one thing and another, I got to pitying her, standing there. I got to thinking, do you know, of all the things we'd done together. There was nothing bad, you know, nothing to be ashamed of, if you understand, but still I didn't care much to think of her standing there watching me going off, maybe for good and all, and she thinking over the things I said to her one time or another. You know yourself, I suppose, the kind of thing you're apt to say to a girl, off and on?"

"I do," said the young man.

"You do?" said Manny. "Well, in that case you'll understand how I felt seeing her standing there. I felt so bad I tried to get back for a few last words with her before the boat pulled out, but there were people coming up against me all the time and I was having to stand aside every other step I took and crush in against the rails to let them pass. And some of them were cranky old devils, telling me to get to hell out of the way, to come if I was coming and go if I was going, and telling me for God Almighty's sake to take my bloody bag out of the way. It was jabbing in the legs of the women without my noticing it, and as sure as I pulled it to one side it jabbed into someone on the other side.

"There was terrible confusion. You'd think, wouldn't you, that the officials would be able to put a stop to it? But I declare to God they were worse than the people that were

travelling. There was one of them clicking tickets at the bottom of the gangway, and all he did was let a shout at me to say I was obstructing the passage. Obstructing!

" 'Come on up, Manny,' shouted the lads from up above on the deck.

" 'Good-bye, Manny,' said Annie in a little bit of a voice you'd hardly hear above the banging of cases and the screaming of the sea gulls."

"You didn't go down!"

"Down I went."

"And the boys?"

"They were staring like as if they were transfixed! They couldn't believe their eyes. They began calling down to us from the deck above, but the wind was going the other way and we couldn't hear one word they were saying. Then the whistles began to blow, and the sailors began spitting on their hands and pulling at the ropes to let the plank up into the boat. The train was getting ready to go back to Westland Row. She was going to pull out any minute.

" 'I knew you'd come to your senses,' said Annie. 'Have you got your bag?'

"I held it up.

" 'Your fiddle?' said Anne.

"By God, if I hadn't left the fiddle above on the deck! Would you believe that? We started shouting up at the lads. Timmy Coyne—that was the little fellow with the moustache sitting next me in the photo—Timmy put his hands up to his mouth like he was playing a bugle (it was the piano he played in the band, by the way) and he shouts out 'Wha-a-a—at?' like that, drawing it out so's we could hear it.

" 'The fiddle!' I shouted. And 'fiddle' isn't a word you can stretch out, you know. No matter how slow you say it, it's said and done in a minute after all. 'Fiddle.' Try it for yourself. 'Fiddle.' It's a funny sort of word, isn't it, when you say it over a few times like that? Anyway, Timmy didn't hear me.

" 'Ca-a-a-n't—he-a-ea-ear!' says he.

"A couple of people round about me began to shout up too. 'Fiddle.' 'Fiddle.' The boat was pushing off from the pier. Suddenly one real game fellow that was after putting a fine young girl on the boat, and after kissing her too in front of

everyone, ups and pulls off his hat, and crooking it under his arm, like it was a fiddle, he starts pulling his right hand back and forth across it for all the world as if he was fiddling a real fiddle. Timmy takes one look at him and down he ducks and starts rooting around on the deck. The next minute he ups and rests the fiddle case on the rails.

" ' Catch ! ' he shouts.

" Across comes the fiddle, over the space of water that was blinding white by this time with the foam from the boat.

" ' It's into the water ! ' shouts someone.

" ' Not on your life ! ' shouts our boy on the wharf, and he leaping into the air to catch it. But you know how slippery them wooden boards are with that green slimy stuff on them ? You do ? Well, to make a long story short, down slips your man, and down comes your fiddle on one of the iron stumps they tie the boat to, and fiddle and case, and even the little bow, were smashed to smithereens under my eyes. You should have heard the crowd laughing. I always say it's easy enough to rise a laugh when you're not doing it for money ! "

" What did Annie say ? "

" ' It's the hand of God,' she said."

" What did you say ? "

" Sure, what could I say ? I just went over and gave a kick with my foot to the bits of wood, and put them floating out on the water, along with the potato peels and cabbage stalks that were just after being flung out of a porthole in the bottom of the boat."

Manny looked down at the grey feather of smoke on the horizon that was all that now remained of the mail boat.

" Whenever I see that little boat," he said, " I get to thinking of the sea and the way it was that day, with all the dirt lapping up and down on it and the bits of wood from the fiddle looking like bits of an old box. Walking back to the train, we could see the bits floating along under us, through the big cracks in the boards. I never can understand why it is they leave such big spaces between those boards anyway. And just as we were going out the gate to the platform, what did I see, down through the splits, but a bit of the bow. And here's a curious thing for you ! You could tell what it was the minute you looked at it, broken and all as it was. ' Oh, look ! ' you'd say

if you happened to be passing along the pier, going for a walk and not knowing anything about me or the boys. 'Look!' you'd say to whoever was with you. 'Isn't that the bow of a fiddle?'"

"Did you ever hear from the boys again?" asked the young man.

"We changed our address," said Manny. "I heard they broke up after a bit. Maybe they wrote and we never got the letter. After we got married we went to live in King Street, over the shop. We opened a shop, you see, in King Street. You know King Street? Our shop is down at the further end, along past the Gaiety. The shop took up pretty near all our time on account of us knowing nothing about business. We never got a minute to ourselves. Look at me! I've been out since early morning trying to get to hear of someone that would deliver eggs to the door. That's what I'm doing now, too, going up here to the Sallygap to see a man I was told about by one of the dealers in Moore Street. The dealer gets them from him twice a week, and I don't see why he couldn't bring us in a couple of dozen at the same time. If he does, we'll put up a card on the window saying 'Fresh Eggs Daily.' The Dublin people would go mad for a fresh egg. Did you ever notice that?"

The conductor came down the aisle and leaned in to Manny.

"We're coming near the Sallygap now," said the conductor.

"Is that right?" said Manny. "Give a touch to the bell, so, and get the driver to stop. Anywhere here will do nicely."

He turned to the young man confidentially. "I have to look for the place, you see."

"I hope you find it all right, sir."

"I hope so. Well, good day to you now. Don't forget the advice I gave you." Manny pointed with his thumb in the direction of the sea, and then he stepped off the bus and found himself on a country road alone, for the first time in so many years you might leave it at that and not say how long.

He found the house he was looking for easily enough. The farmer promised to send in the eggs twice a week, and three times if the orders got bigger. He wanted to know if Manny ever tried selling chickens or geese. Manny said his wife took care of the orders. The farmer asked if he would mention the matter to his wife. Manny agreed to do so.

Manny didn't want chickens or geese. Manny wanted a drink. He wasn't a drinking man, but he wanted a glass of beer, just then, to take the thirst off him. He remembered that they had passed a public house a while before he got off the bus. He started walking down towards it.

As he walked along he thought of the boys again. It was a long time since he had thought of them. The boat put him in mind of them. And the young fellow he was sitting beside was just about the age he was himself in those days. That must be why he told him so much. He was a nice young fellow. Manny wondered who he was, and he wondered, just as idly, what hour he'd get a bus going back to Dublin.

But it was nice enough, mind you, walking along the road like this, he thought. He didn't care if the bus was a bit slow in coming. It was not as if it were raining or cold. It was a nice evening. He often heard tell of young lads from Dublin coming up here on their bicycles on a fine evening, and leaving the bicycles inside a fence while they went walking on the roads. Just walking, mind you; just walking. He used to think it was a bit daft. Now that he was up here himself, looking around and listening, he could begin to see how a quiet sort of chap might like this class of thing. Manny looked at the hedges that were tangled with wild vetches, and he looked at an old apple tree crocheted over with grey-lace lichen. He looked at the gleaming grass in the wet ditch, and at the flowers and flowering reeds that grew there. "They all have names, I suppose," thought Manny. Could you beat that!

Walking along, he soon came to a cottage with dirty brown thatch from which streaks of rain had run from time to time, leaving yellow stripes on the lime. As he got near, a woman came to the door with a black pot and swilled out a slop of green water into the road, leaving a stench of cabbage in the air when she went in. It was a queer time to be cooking her cabbage, thought Manny, and then he chuckled. "For God's sake," he said out aloud, "will you look at the old duck!"

A duck had flapped over from the other side of the road to see if the cabbage water made a pool big enough to swim in. "Will you just look at him!" said Manny, and, as the road was empty, he must have been talking to himself. And he was giving himself very superfluous advice, because he was staring at

the duck as hard as he could. After a minute a geranium pot was taken down from inside one of the small windows of the cottage, and a face came close to the glass. "They don't like you stopping and staring, I suppose," thought Manny, and he moved along.

His thoughts were on the smallness and darkness of the place for some time. He wondered how people put up with living in a little poke like that, and the thought of his own rooms behind the shop in King Street seemed better to him than it had for a long time. After all, they had a range. They had gas. They had the use of the lavatory on the upper landing. He was pleased to think of all the many advantages he had over those people that were peeping out at him. He used to feel that the rooms in King Street were terrible and that he was doomed to live in them all his life, while men no older than he went here and went there, and did this and did that, and some of them even went off to Paris. But at that moment he felt it was a fine thing after all to have a place of your own to keep things in, a place where you could lie down if you were sick or worn out. And it was within a stone's throw of the Pillar.

He didn't get out enough—that was the trouble. If he got out and about more he'd have the right attitude to the house, and maybe to the shop, too. No wonder he'd be sick of it; never leaving it except like this, on a message. He should take an odd day off. Man! What was he talking about? He ought to take a week. He ought to run over to Paris and look up the boys. Then, as if aghast at the grandeur of his revolt, Manny gave himself an alternative. He should go over to Liverpool, anyway, for one of the week-end race-meetings. With a bit of luck he might make his expenses, and that would shut Annie's mouth.

The public-house came into view just then, and very opportunely, because Manny went in with the high head of one who contemplates a sojourn in distant lands.

He ordered his drink. There were two or three locals leaning against the counter, and a large man, obviously a commercial traveller, stood cleaning his spectacles and asking questions about the village. The locals were looking sheepishly at their empty glasses that were dowdily draped with scum. The

traveller gave order for them to be filled up again. He looked down the counter at Manny as if he would like to include him in the company, but there was a repelling air of independence about Manny, due perhaps to his bowler hat, which sat self-consciously upon the bar counter.

Manny listened to the talk at the other end of the bar. Once or twice the locals mistook the traveller's meaning, but Manny felt a warmth in his heart for them. Their dull-wittedness created a feeling of security. He felt a great dislike for the talkative traveller. He hoped that they would not be on the same bus going back to the city.

Just then the sound of an engine stole into the stillness outside. The bus was coming. Manny drank up, and put out his hand for his hat. Out of the corner of his eye he saw the traveller buttoning his overcoat. He heard his jocose farewells to the locals, who were already leaning back with greater ease against the counter.

Manny went towards the door. The traveller went towards the door. In the doorway they met.

"I see you are taking this bus, too," said the traveller. Manny had, of course, intended going back on that bus. He had no idea when there would be another bus. But a great revulsion came over him at the thought of journeying back with the large, talkative man.

"I'm waiting for the next bus," he said, impulsively.

"I'm sorry!" said the traveller. "I should have been glad of your company. Good evening."

"Good evening," said Manny, and he stood back from the dust of the bus.

When the dust had blown into the hedges, Manny stepped into the middle of the road and doggedly faced the way the bus had gone. He would be walking for a long time before another bus caught up with him, but he did not care. A rare recklessness urged him onwards, and when the night came down swiftly over him the feeling of recklessness was deepened.

He walked along, looking from side to side, and in his heart the night's potent beauty was beginning to have effect. He felt a happiness and richness that confused his mind. The dark hills and the pale silk-shining sky, and the city pricking out its shape upon the sea with starry lights, filled him with strange

feelings of sadness and joy mingled together. And when the sky flowered into a thousand stars of forget-me-not blue he was strangled with the need to know what had come over him. His heart was all confusion. And, having no thoughts to meet and stem the tide of desolating joy that began to swell so suddenly within him, he ran down the road the way he used to run on the roads as a young lad, and as he ran he laughed out loud to think that he, Manny Ryan, was running along a country road in the dark, hardly knowing when he'd run into a hedge or a ditch.

Yesterday, if anyone came to him and suggested that he'd do such a thing, he would have split his sides laughing. And to-morrow, if he were to try and persuade Annie to take a walk out in the country, she'd look at him as if he were daft. The Dublin people couldn't tell you the difference between a bush and a tree. Manny stood to recover his breath. That was a fact. All the Dublin people were good for was talking. 'They'd talk you out of your mind.

He thought of his wife with her yellow elbows coming through the black unravelled sleeve of her cardigan, as she leaned across the counter in the dismal shop, giving off old shaffoge with any shawley that came the way with an hour, or maybe two hours, to spare. He thought of the bars filled with his cronies talking about the state of the country for all they were fit, men that never saw more of it than you'd see from the top of a tram. He thought of the skitting young fellows and girls outside Whitefriar Street after late Mass on Sunday, and he thought of the old men standing at the pub ends of the streets, ringing themselves round with spits. He thought of the old women leaning against the jambs of their doorways, with white crockery milk jugs hanging out of their hands, forgotten in the squalor of their gossip. He thought of the children sitting among the trodden and rancid cabbage butts on the edge of the paths, whispering over again the gossip they had heard when they crouched, unheeded, under some counter. He thought of the young and the old, the men and the women, and the pale frightened children, who were shuffling along kneelers in churches all over the city, waiting their turn to snuffle out their sins in the dark wooden confessionals.

It seemed as if the cool green light of day scarcely ever reached

those people; or the night-shaded lights of evening. The only wind that blew into their streets came out from their own drafty houses thickened with the warm odour of boiling potatoes. The loathing he felt for the city, years before, when he first came to Dublin, stole over him again as it had come over him one night long ago in the little theatre in Mary Street. "Dublin jackeens!" he muttered.

"Dublin jackeens!" he said out loud, the jibe coming forth from some dim green corner in his mind where the memory of a buttercup field, and a cobbled yard prickled with grass, gave him the right to feel immunity from them. Once more he longed to get away from Dublin. But this time there was a difference. He wanted to get away from Dublin, but not from Ireland. He didn't want to go away from Ireland, he thought, with anguish; not away from her yellow fields and not away from her emerald ditches; only to get away from the stuffy Dublin streets and people that walked them. Even to get away for an hour, like this, would satisfy him.

Wasn't it well, after all, he hadn't gone away to Paris? Things turned out for the best in the end. If he had gone away he would never have come up here to Sallygap. And he would never have found out that peace was not a matter of one city or another, but a matter of hedges and fields and waddling ducks and handfuls of stars. Cities were all alike. Paris was no better than Dublin when you looked into the matter clearly. Paris was a wicked place, by all accounts, even if they did have a rare time there at night, with the lights and the bandstands.

Who ever heard of the boys since they went? Where were they? God alone knew where. They were playing, maybe, in some cellar done up with striped tablecloths, like in the pictures, with smoke cutting their guts, and women with big thighs and dresses torn open down to the waist sitting on their knees and cracking the strings of their sinews with the weight.

A sweat broke out on Manny, and he had to stand in the cold road to let the vision fade and the winds cool his burning face. He was damn glad he stayed at home. What was the need in anybody going across seas when all he had to do, if he got sick of himself, was take a bus and come up to a place like this? As long as a fellow could come up to a place like this, what was the need of going farther?

"I'll come up here again," said Manny, "upon my word I will." He had found at last his real escape from the sordidness of the life he led, and perhaps in time the seed of sensitiveness that had lain sterile in his heart through his bleak and unnatural spring and summer might have had a rare and wonderful winter flowering. There are gentle souls who take nothing from their coarse rearing, and less from their chance schooling, but who yet retain their natural gentleness, and sometimes it flowers, as Manny's did, in the hills.

"I'll come back again," he said. "I'll come back again all right." He turned to look at the hanging hills before he went round the last bend in the road, where the houses and shops of Rathfarnham would hide them from view.

With the first shops and the first beginnings of the city with its dazzling tramlines, its noises, and its shoving crowds, Manny felt the tiredness he had not felt in all the enchanted miles of rough road he had walked. His feet burned. His thighs were heavy, his back was weighted down with the knapsack of weariness. He took a tram and sat on the edge of the only seat that was vacant, his light weight joggling with every motion, and the elbow and hipbone of a fat woman on the inside of the seat nudging his ribs with the insistence of inadvertency. Smells of gas and oil sickened him. Broken lights strained his eyes. But most of all a dread of returning home came over him as he remembered that Annie had told him to hurry. The sharp strokes of Annie's voice sounded sudden and loud in his ears, and it seemed impossible that he had forgotten what she said. He felt like a little boy who had blotted his copy, a little boy who had lost the change, a little boy who creeps in under fear of the whip.

The fear of her whipping tongue hung over him all the way along the suburbs. When he reached home and saw the closed shutters of the shop, his hand was so stiff and cold he could hardly find the string in the letter box by which the latch of the door could be pulled back from outside. His hand clattered the letter box for a long time, and then he pulled the string and the door opened. He went in. He groped around empty packing cases and felt for the knob of the kitchen door. He didn't see that the door was wide open because the room was

dark and the fire was only a powdering of red ash among grey. Annie was sitting at the fire. His eyes became used to the dark, and after a minute the room was clear before him, the customary position of things supplementing the eye, where it failed, enabling him to reach the fire and sit down on one side of the range, watching Annie on the other side, and wondering when she would speak.

She said nothing. The truth was that she had been so excited at his unusual absence that she was left unfit for any emotion at his eventual return.

Marriage had been an unselfishness on Manny's part. He had married Annie because he thought that was what would make her happy, and he was weakly content to give up his freedom for that object. She, however, had not thought of marriage as anything but a means of breaking the monotony. But she had found it a greater monotony than the one she had fled from, and, unlike the other, it had no anteroom of hope leading to something better. Manny accepted her so complacently from the first day that he bored her in a week with his monotonously kind manner. Soon she began to show an artificial irritation at trifles in the hope of stirring up a little excitement, but Manny was kinder and more gentle on those occasions than he was before. Gradually her irritability and petulance became more daring until they could scarcely be classed as such venial sins. And soon, too, what had been slyly deliberate became involuntary, and the sour expression of her face hardened into the mask of middle age. She sought in the throbbing pulse and rippling flux of anger the excitement she had unconsciously hoped to find in her marriage bed. But her angers, too, were sterile, breeding no response in Manny. He was the same always. It seemed that she would never believe this, and she tried from time to time to break the strength of his weakness, and she fought against his kindness as if it were her enemy. And so, in an obscure way, it was.

Annie Ryan's nature was too fierce for the quiescent passions of love and motherhood. She wanted the flaming face, the racing anger, the temper that raised red weals on the skin, and the heat of two bodies crushed together in a rage of wrestling. And this need of her nature had never been satisfied except vicariously, leaning over the shop counter listening to the

whispered stories of other women; stories of obscene blows given in drunken lusts, stories of cunning and cupidity and red flashes of anger and hate that rent the darkness in tenement hallways around the block when she and Manny were asleep for hours.

"Ah, woman dear," they said to her, "sure you know nothing at all about life." And then, as if she were to be pitied, they rolled up their sleeves indulgently and showed her scalds, and scabby sores, saying, "Take a look at that!"

And sometimes, standing at the hall door in the dark at night after the shop was long shut, she would hear a scream in some room high up across the street or round the corner, and then dull thudding sounds and children's voices sounding as if they were frightened out of their wits. Or sometimes a neighbour would come down the street sobbing loudly, linked on either side by her children, sobbing softer and asking her in high childish voices not to mind, not to mind. Not to mind what? Annie wondered. Which of the incentive words and gestures she had heard the neighbours tell about had provoked this woman to hysteria? She used to draw back a bit into the doorway while they were passing, and sometimes, pressed sideways against the wall so they wouldn't see her spying on them, she used to catch a glimpse of Manny sitting in the kitchen with his stocking feet up on the cooling range while he read the paper. Her eyes would flicker with hatred and resentment, and she would have an ignoble impulse to be revenged on him by going in and poking the range, sending clouds of ashes over him till he had to get up and go out.

This day, when he did not come back at the usual time, she set her mind on planning some taunt for him as he came through the shop. If there were customers there, it would be so much the better. One time she wouldn't have risked a row before the customers, but she soon found it helped trade more than it hindered it, particularly when Manny never answered back or made trouble. But, as the evening wore out and there was still no sign of him, she began to think better of him. She began to think that in his weak way he was defying her at last. Maybe he was getting his temper up with drink. He wasn't a drinking man, but there was always a time to start.

A wild elation welled up inside her, waiting for a torrential

release in singing or loud shouting. She had battered in his patience at last. He was going to try to get even with her. She was ready. She went into the kitchen and left the door into the shop half open while she knotted her hair as tight as she could, and when she came back the pricking pain on her neck, where the hair was too tightly caught, gave her a foretaste of the fight she would have, and made her eyes glitter. She let the customers go without giving them their usual bit of chitchat. She put the shutters up before the time. Where was he? It was getting very late now for a timid man like Manny. And he had no dinner. She lifted the saucer that was covering his plate on the range. She ought to let him get a bite of food into him before she started the row. Where was he?

She was on her way out to the door to look up the street when she saw the silhouette of the poor-house hearse, the Black Maria, passing the door. Supposing he was gone for good? The little skunk! That would be just like him, to go over the river wall, like a rat in the dark, and never be heard of again. She would be cheated in this like everything else. Then the darkness lifted a little in her heart and she began to consider other possibilities. Maybe he skipped off to better himself somewhere and give her a miss? Fear beat throbbingly in her breast, but it faded out as she remembered that he wouldn't have any money. Thanks be to the Almighty, and to her own good sense, she hadn't given him the money for the eggs. She wondered if he got them. Did he go for them at all?

One after another, then, pictures of horror came into her mind. She saw a sodden corpse, white and hideously swollen, being carried in across the shop, and dripping water from muddy clothes upon the thirsty wooden boards. She saw herself at the wake, moaning and rocking from side to side at the fire, fanged with the yellow teeth of remorse and mauled by memories.

He wasn't a bad sort, the poor fellow, always wanting to take her to the Gaiety when the opera was on. He wasn't to blame for being so weak. His hands always went dead when he was cold. His face got a terrible blue colour in frosty weather. She thought about the peculiar habit he had of sleeping with his feet outside the bedclothes. And she began to feel uneasy about the past as well as about the future. She walked up and down the dark room.

Once in a while she went into the street and looked up and down. She did that in an effort to anticipate the terror she felt was coming nearer every minute, rounding each corner more rapidly than the one before. But the evening winds were cooling the air and breathing their clear sweet peace into the streets. The lights were lighted, but their rays were not yet drawn out from them because the day had still some brightness of its own. They kept their gold carefully folded inside their glass globes, against the hour when their light would be needed, and it seemed as if they had no other function than to decorate the streets with gilt stars. The trams too were lit up, and they sailed like gilded galleons down the evanescent evening blue. The noises of trucks and drays sounded singly in the stillness and seemed to say that they were going off as fast as they could, and that soon the city would be given over to the revelry sounds of cars and taxis travelling to gaudy cinemas and theatres pearly with lights.

The city evening was so fair and so serene, so green and blue and gilt, that she disliked looking at it, for it threatened to rob her of all her dreads and deluge her fears with the sane waters of hope. She preferred to sit by the whitening fire and imagine that the city that lay outside was dark and vicious as she had often seen it to be, crossing it late on winter nights ; a place of evil shadows, with police standing silently in the alleyways, and its shops shut down and barricaded with boards like coffin lids, and all the private houses fortified with battered ash-cans lined up along the path, and, dreariest of all, the Green with its padlocked gates and its tree-high railings, through which you heard the agonies of a thousand cats wailing out from the dark greenery.

She did not know which of her black forebodings she felt to be the more likely, but the ones that brought their terror without robbing her henceforth of the object of them were the ones that most appealed to her, and so she more or less expected a living Manny to be brought home to her ; but one in whom some latent mutinous instinct had at last done its work and set up a tremorous twanging of chords that would echo throughout the rest of their lives and put reality into their relations. She waited for his coming with more eagerness than when he was coming to court her.

But the instant she heard his footfall she knew he was the same old Manny. She knew he was all right. She knew he was sober. Her fears faded out in widening ripples, leaving stillness and stagnation in her heart once more. When he put his head inside the door she knew by his hesitation and his apologetic cough that not even his own pleasure had kept him out so late, much less a high-riding, spur-jabbing revolt. She didn't even want to know what it was that kept him, because she knew it was some pale and weedy shoot from the anemia of his character, and no sudden bursting into leaf of unsuspected manliness.

She sat by the fire without moving.

Manny was drained of thought by her silence. He was driven to break it with words of his own.

"Did you keep my dinner?" he said, going over to the range, stooping his head as he went to avoid the slapping of wet sheets and towels that hung across the kitchen on a piece of string. He opened the door of the oven and looked in, bending down. There was nothing there, and he shut the door quietly and stole a look at Annie. She was sitting scratching her head, with a hairpin she had pulled out of the tight knot of hair on her neck.

"Get up out of that!" she ordered him tonelessly, and, pulling a damp cloth off the line over their heads, she took a hot plate from the top of the stove and went over to a pile of rubbish in the corner of the room.

"Light the gas," she said, pulling out a square of brown paper from the pile of rubbish and setting the plate down upon it on the table. The nauseous smell of gas roamed around the room in streamers that soon ran together into one thick odour. The green light took away the only dignity the room had—its darkness. Manny sat down to the dinner set on the brown paper. It was a plate of meat flanked on two sides by tallow-yellow potatoes and a mounded pile of cabbage that still held the shape of the fork that patted it into place on the plate. Meat, potato, and cabbage were all stuck fast to the dish by a caking of dried gravy that the heat had crusted into a lacy doily of brown scallop and flutings to within an inch of the plate edge.

"It looks good," said Manny appeasingly, "and it smells good."

"It smelled better four hours ago," said Annie, cleaning a knife on her apron and putting it down beside the plate.

Manny wondered if the reference to keeping the dinner hot was intended as an opening for him to say where he had been, and what had kept him. He looked at Annie and decided on saying nothing.

He ate his dinner in silence and tried as best he could to keep the food in his mouth from making noise, but the sounds of chewing seemed so loud in his own ears that he began to swallow down the coarse lumps of beef unchewed. Soon the silence became so terrible he could eat no more. He pushed aside his plate and sat staring at the ring of grease it left on the absorbent brown paper. He thought of the paper he had used the night before his wedding to get the grease out of his sleeve. Reading in bed used to get his clothes all candle-grease, because he used to hump up his clothes to raise the candlestick higher beside the bed. That was a long time ago. The past was coming back into his mind all day. He used to hear his mother say that you re-lived all your life in your mind before you died, but he hated all those ignorant old superstitions. This silence was enough to make a man go mad.

He turned around in the chair and deliberately drew down the lash of her rage by saying quietly, "I went up to Sallygap to get the eggs, but I missed the bus and walked home."

"From the Sallygap?"

He had expected a vicious answer. He looked at her. She was picking her teeth with a bit of the brown paper she tore off the table.

"Gets in your teeth, doesn't it?" he said in a faint-hearted hope that there was not going to be any row.

"Are you finished?" she said.

He looked at his plate.

"Finished," he said. "All except my tea. I'll wet the tea myself if you like."

"The tea is on the pot," she said, and as he poured the spluttering water into the teapot she got up and went over to the dresser and took down a cup and saucer. She put them on the table.

The cup had not been washed since it was last used. There

was a sandy sediment of moist sugar in the bottom of it, and down the outside were yellow streaks of tea.

"This cup is a bit dirty," said Manny, moving over to the sink.

"It's your own dirt, then," she said to him. "It was you who had it last."

He stood irresolute, and then he said he'd like a clean cup.

"There's a quarter pound of sugar in the bottom of that cup," she said, and then she snapped at him suddenly with some apparent relevancy in her own mind between the two sentences, "What did you do with the return ticket?"

He rooted in his pockets and took out the half-ticket. She snapped it up and looked at it closely, and then she stuck it down in a jug that was hanging by its handle on the nail of the dresser.

"Is he going to send the eggs?"

"Every Monday and Friday."

"Give me that cup," she said, and went over to the sink, where she ran the cold tap on it. She clattered it back on the saucer; wet. Cold drops splashed on to his hot hands from her wet hands. She stood looking down at him.

"It's a queer thing when a man disgusts to himself!" she said.

Her eyes were greener than ever. They used to remind him of the sea at Howth, where they went walking while they were courting. They were the same colour still, but they reminded him suddenly of the still green water under the landing stage at Dunlaoghaire. And as that sticky sea was one day flecked with splinters of a broken fiddle, her eyes above him now were flecked with splinters of malevolence.

He used to be afraid of her sharp tongue, ever since their first quarrel. But it had been the fear of a timid soul. Now, looking up into her silent eyes, he felt the immature and childish fear fall from him, and instead of it there came into his heart a terrible adult fear; a fear that came from his instincts, from his blood. He thought of all the talk he had heard at different times in public-houses, talk of morgues and murders, and he remembered what he said himself up at Sallygap about the people of Dublin; that they were ignorant people with clogged pools in their blood that clotted easily to unjust hate. They

held their hate. He thought of Paris, with its quick flashing lights and its quick flashing hates and its quick flashing knives; its women with quick hands slapping the face at an effrontery, and banging the door as they went out into the streets, their red lips glossy with temper. And the dangers of Paris seemed suddenly fresh and vital compared with the dead man's danger of the sullen and malevolent eyes that were watching him. Desperately he thought of the hills, but the thought of them gave him no refuge. The happy hills were falling into forgetfulness already. He would never seek a sanctuary among them again.

For there was no sanctuary from hatred such as that he saw in Annie's eyes, unless it came to him from behind some night, when a raised hatchet crashed down on his skull, or from a queer taste in the mouth followed by a twisting in the guts. She had him imprisoned for ever in her hatred. His little fiddle had crashed on the pier the day he gave up all his dreams for her, and it had floated in splintered sticks on the water. He thought of it for a moment and then he thought of nothing for a while, but just sat watching her as she went about the room.

Then suddenly he remembered that she had said something to him when she clattered down the wet cup on the saucer in front of him a little while before. He tried to think what it was she said. He couldn't remember what it was.

But he remembered, distinctly, thinking at the time that it was true, whatever it was.



Love is for Lovers



At the non-committal age of forty-four, Mathew Simmins began to think about marriage. Somehow or other he had never thought about it before. It took up pretty nearly all his time to get a day's work done in a day because, only for him, the business would have fallen to pieces long ago. The paid workers always quit on the stroke of the hour no matter what they were doing. He was a paid hand, too, of course, but he felt like one of the firm. He took the same interest. The others went at the first stroke of the hour, not even the last stroke, but Mathew didn't feel it quite within his rights to argue the point with them. He wasn't absolutely certain whether it was the first or the last stroke which indicated exactly the termination of one hour and the commencement of the next. He kept it in mind for a considerable time to ask a jeweller, but he never had occasion to go into a jeweller's and somehow or other the thing slipped his mind, although he never lost his feeling of irritation every time the clock struck six, when he saw the shop-boys reaching up behind the storehouse door for their coats and scarves.

The assistants were always down at the storehouse end of the shop, tipping up to six, so as not to lose any time. And if one of them happened to get caught with a customer, down at the street-door end, he came running back, springing a vault over the counter, as much as to say that there was no need for deference to Mathew once six had gone.

Five minutes past six the blinds were down and the counters bare, and on more than one occasion a mouse came out across the floor the minute the street door clapped after the last of the shop-boys. The first time it happened Mathew thought it

was a toy mouse on a string, evidencing some impertinent joke on the part of one of the boys, but it was indeed a real mouse and it had the effrontery to go at the cheese right before his eyes. That meant another delay putting muslin over the cheese and laying down traps, inside and outside the counter. There was always something. He often found figures listed up with a line drawn under them, and whoever had jotted them down had not taken time to add them up because the clock struck six. Sometimes the till wasn't even shoved back after the last coin was flung into it.

Mathew kept order during shop hours, but he didn't like to be all the time picking on the boys. They were young, after all, and they did what they were paid to do. Mathew himself received pay, too, of course, but there was a difference. Old Mr. Mahaffy slid an envelope across the dining-room table on the last day of the month, when Mathew called at his house with the account books. It was always a vellum envelope, not a thin yellow one with the name of the shop on it and an advertisement for rice on the flap, like the envelopes that Mathew himself put the boys' pay into, every Friday night, to have ready for handing out to them on Saturday morning. Mathew was paid all right, but he never felt that he was a paid hand, in the general sense of the word. He practically ran the business. Without him it would have gone long ago. Mr. Mahaffy hadn't his father's ability, but he was an exceedingly nice man and was said to be one of the best chess players in the world, although he never entered any competitions or the like. Mathew was in complete charge.

On Friday nights, making up the money and sorting out the pay into the yellow envelopes, Mathew felt as if the business belonged to him. He felt that he was a partner. He was the active partner. Mr. Mahaffy was the sleeping partner. But Mathew couldn't have done without him. He himself had a good bit of money saved up, but he had made it all in Mahaffy's Stores. Twenty years ago he hadn't a penny. Where would he have been to-day if it hadn't been for Mr. Mahaffy? Sleeping partners were an essential. Mathew, of course, never treated Mr. Mahaffy any differently from the way he treated him twenty years ago. He was always very deferential. He kept his place. There had never been any open reference to a

partnership. Mathew had never presumed. But the gratitude was there. The gratitude was there.

"You are Mahaffy's, Mathew," Mr. Mahaffy said every time he slid the pay envelope across the mahogany to Mathew. "You are Mahaffy's, Mathew, and Mahaffy's is you! I am only a good-for-nothing! I only cash the cheques!"

On those occasions Mathew always spoke up. "You write the cheques, too, sir!"

Mr. Mahaffy liked him to say that. At that point every month, he put out his hand and gave Mathew a hearty handshake. It was always the same. Mathew knew just when to come and just when to go. He liked that. He liked to know where he was with a person. That was probably why he was so upset when Mrs. Rita Cooligan began to leave things after her on the counters and come back again in a state.

"Mr. Simmins! Where is Mr. Simmins?" she called out, as she came running back into the shop, no matter who was there. And when she saw him she always ran up to him and pushed her hat up off her forehead in a way that made her look frightened and helpless although she was so big and strong. Mr. Simmins was quite small, and thin, but he felt protective all the same, and sent the shop-boys searching everywhere, although he knew they made it an excuse for bobbing under the counters and pushing and shoving and trying to trip each other up. He himself always took up things off the counter and looked under them, and made quite a mess. Sometimes it was a handkerchief that she left behind. Sometimes it was a ring of keys. And indeed, on more than one occasion, after the whole shop had been turned topsy-turvy, Mrs. Cooligan gave a loud, rich laugh, and called herself names for being such a featherhead, and pulled up whatever it was they had been looking for, from the inside pocket of her bag! Then Mathew smiled, and the boys laughed, and Mrs. Cooligan herself had to put her arms across her chest to keep herself from shaking, she laughed so much. She was a nice woman, Mathew thought. He wondered what her husband died of, and how long he was dead. It was sad to see a sonsy woman like that, living all alone.

The minute after Mathew had formed that thought in his mind he felt ashamed. He could feel the heat creeping into his

face. It wasn't like him to be coarse. In fact it was a thing he always guarded against.

One nice bright day in November, when the sun was so strong they had to remove the butter from the window, Mr. Simmins saw Mrs. Cooligan coming down the street on the other side, and crossing over. He couldn't tell whether a woman had a good figure or not; he often thought some of the young girls that came into the shop were thin and delicate, and he felt like mentioning the fact to their parents, because of course you couldn't be twenty years in a place without taking a friendly interest, especially in children you saw grow up from the pram. Yet the thinnest ones were often the very ones that he would hear the boys talking about, outside the door in the morning, while he was inside sliding the bolts across and opening up to let them in. But on this particular morning, when he saw Mrs. Cooligan crossing over the shining tram rails in the sun, he said to himself that a blind man couldn't help seeing that she was a well-cut-out woman. If you put her up against the other women in the street, he thought, where were they? No where at all, he had to confess. And he took out his brown-spotted handkerchief and blew his nose very vehemently.

Her coat was tight and her feet were arched up on high Spanish heels, and he liked the way her leather belt was pulled tight like a man's till the top of her rose up out of it with a swell. It put him in mind of the big swan that used to be on the mill river at home, when he was a boy. It rose up off the water with a swell of its feathers, just that very way. It was white, of course, and there was something dark about Mrs. Cooligan. Her coat was black; it may have been that which gave her a dark appearance. Her hair was dark, too. And although he had never thought about it before, Mathew noted that her skin was dark. She had an olive complexion, you might go as far as to say, he decided.

When she came into the shop Mathew stayed at the window putting one thing here and another thing there, because he felt a bit put out at having seen her coming. He pulled down the blind a few inches and then he let it up again. He was not paying very great attention to what he was doing. Suddenly the blind cord slipped out of his hand and it slapped up with

a bang that brought the blood to his head. He wasn't used to taking much notice of the customers. He didn't get time, to tell the honest truth. He was nearly always attending on two people at the one time.

So he stayed at the window all the time Mrs. Cooligan was in the shop, and when he felt a wreath of Oriental perfume circle into the window space over his head, he knew that she was leaving the shop and passing out by the door near the window. He kept his head as far into the window space as possible until he heard the door slap after her as she passed into the street. But this was a mistake, because he had his head so far into the window that he couldn't draw it back again quickly enough before she passed along outside the plate glass. And what did she do? She stared straight into the window at him. Mathew knew she was staring at him but he could not see her properly because a fly-paper hung down right between them. He could almost swear, however, that she knew he was avoiding her, and he wouldn't have wished that for the world.

She was one of their best customers. He would have to make amends the next time she came into the shop. Perhaps he would open a new tin of biscuits and ask her to try one. Nothing pleased customers better than that, he found. And it served a purpose as well. If they didn't buy a pound of them, there and then, they bought a pound of some other kind that they thought was better, and advised him not to stock too much of the new ones, saying they were a bit on the sweet side, or the plain side, as the case might be. He never paid any attention to what they said, of course, because one man's meat is another man's poison. Whoever said that must have had some knowledge of the world, he thought. And he carefully lifted his right leg out of the window, and was just lifting his left leg out when the door of the shop was banged open with such force that a pile of empty tin boxes that stood behind the door was sent crashing to the floor with a fearful din.

"Oh, what have I done? What have I done?" said a rich, olive voice, and Mrs. Rita Cooligan was standing in the centre of the shop, pushing back her hat from her forehead.

"Where is Mr. Simmins? I'm so upset! Mr. Simmins! Mr. Simmins!" And she ran over to Mathew, so excited, and

so upset, that she caught him by the sleeve while she told him incoherently that she had left her handbag somewhere, and she couldn't remember where.

"I tried the butcher's," she said, "and I didn't leave it there. I tried the draper's and I didn't leave it there. And I couldn't possibly have dropped it in the street because Mr. Keane the chemist would have seen it fall. He was standing at the door, he said, and he never took his eyes off me, he said." She threw out her hands. "I must have left it here!"

She pushed her hat still farther back off her forehead and her dark hair looked moist. She was very upset. Mathew looked at her with interest. She was a regular scatterbrain, widow and all though she was. She shouldn't be trusted with bags and purses. She was the kind of woman who needed someone with her every hour of the day. She shouldn't be alone.

"Now, don't get excited, Mrs. Cooligan," he said. "Perhaps you didn't bring it out with you at all!"

"Oh, I did. I did," said Mrs. Cooligan. "I took it with me deliberately because I came out specially to lodge a little money at the bank."

"Perhaps you left the bag in the bank?"

"I didn't go to the bank yet!"

"This is serious," said Mathew, lifting up paper bags and cardboard boxes from the top of the counter and telling the boys to look around on the floor.

"I hope there wasn't a large sum of money in it?" he asked, not bothering to wipe the butter off his cuff as he took his hand out from behind the slab of butter and felt underneath some balls of string that were ravelling and catching on his buttons.

"Oh, it isn't the money I care about," said Mrs. Cooligan, "but there was a very dear souvenir in the bag; a little paper knife; a little ivory paper knife." And to Mathew's embarrassment, her eyes filled with tears, and standing just where she was the light caught in her tears and made her look very unhappy indeed. "I was never without it before," she said, "since the day it was given to me." And it flashed into Mathew's mind that it must have been given to her by the other fellow, her husband. He was irritated by her sentimentality.

Mathew was so irritated that he walked over and waited on

two other customers before he did any more searching for the bag, and even then he didn't search as thoroughly as he might have done. Why didn't she keep the thing at home where it would be safe if it meant so much to her?

Mrs. Cooligan was talking to one of the boys, but when Mathew came back she turned to him and finished what she was saying.

"It belonged to a dear friend of mine," she said. "We were at school together. We were the best of friends. We went everywhere linked. And now she's in Australia, and I haven't heard from her for three years."

Mathew could have kicked himself for being so hasty in misjudging her.

"We'll get it!" he said. "We'll get it, if we have to turn the shop upside down. If necessary I will paste a notice on the window." He turned to one of the shop-boys. "Get a pencil," he said, "and write out a notice. Say we will give a reward." Then he turned back to Mrs. Cooligan. "That does not mean that I have given up hope of finding it here," he said, reassuringly, and as he spoke he dragged the cash register out from the wall and ran his hand down behind it. Then he plucked a boy by the sleeve. "Did you try the sugar bin?" he asked. "We lost one of the weights here one day, do you remember? I forget which weight it was, the half-pound or the three-ounce, but whichever one it was, anyway, we were at a great loss for it. We searched everywhere and no avail. I was just on the point of sending out to buy another one to replace it, when I happened to run my hand into the sugar in the bin to see if there was enough in it for the week-end, and what do you suppose? I ran my hand against something hard. I called Joe. 'Come here, Joe,' I said. 'There's something here! Put down your hand and see what it is.' And Joe pulled up the weight there and then before my eyes."

Joe nodded his head in affirmation of the story and then he went over to the sugar bin and ran his hand through the sugar.

Mrs. Cooligan leaned over the counter and called out to him. "Any luck, Joe?" she asked.

But Mathew couldn't help staring at her while she was leaning over the counter. She reminded him more than ever of the swan on the old mill river, the way she swelled over the counter, the rest of her hidden by the showcases.

Joe had no luck. There wasn't a sign of the bag, he said, high up or low down.

"If we get it before closing hour I'll send Joe over with it," said Mathew.

"It's not the money I mind," said Mrs. Cooligan, "it's the paper knife; a little ivory paper knife, with carving on the handle. It was never out of the house before. It brought me confidence, I felt. I kept it on the table beside my bed, for luck. If there was a noise in the street in the middle of the night I always put out my hand and felt for it and kept my hand on it. It made me feel safe. But I suppose you think me very silly?" She smiled at Mathew as she spoke, and when he answered her he spoke very solemnly.

"I'll do all in my power!" he said.

The tears filled into her eyes again, but this time she had her back to the light, and the tears gave Mathew a most extraordinary impression. It was almost as if she were glad about something, he thought, although what there was to be glad about in having lost a bag with money in it, he could not for the life of him make out, as he readied up the counter that evening, and went to the back of the shop to take down his out-door coat.

Mathew kept his coat on a separate nail, a little away from the nails on which the assistants hung their coats. There had to be some distinction. As he was reaching in to get down the coat he kicked against something. And as he said afterward, he almost knew what it was before he stooped to pick it up. It was Mrs. Cooligan's bag.

Mathew was delighted. The boys had searched for ten solid minutes; and here now all he had to do was walk across the shop and there was the bag under his feet as if by magic! He picked it up and saw that it was open. He carefully closed the big brass clasp. It took him a few minutes to close the clasp. There was a little trick to it.

"Very clever!" said Mathew to himself when the lock clicked into its socket. And he thought how different it was from a man's plain wallet. Women were extraordinary!

That was probably the first time that the thought of marriage entered Mathew's head, and it was a negative kind of thought at that. Certainly it was not a constructive kind of thought,

because, as he dwelt upon the differences between men and women he assumed that, great and small, they were differences he would never fully explore.

As he went out through the street door and pushed it hard to make sure that the bolts were secured, it just crossed his mind that it was an odd thing that he had never thought of getting married himself. But like all thoughts about roads not taken, his thought was barren and it bred no fiery determinations. He felt just as he always did, a little chilly, a little stiff, as he went along the street to his lodgings.

It was only as he was passing Abbey Row that he realized how near he was to where Mrs. Cooligan lived. He looked down at the terrace of houses than ran off from the main street. It was a pity to keep her in suspense about the bag until morning. It was a pity he didn't find it before the boys went home. He could have sent it to her. He could at least have sent her word that it was safe. As he crossed over the street he had a better view of the terrace. It was dark, but halfway down the terrace there was one house that had a light shining out from behind orange curtains. He imagined that that was her house. He felt sure that was the colour she would have around her, orange, with a touch of brown or red. She was so dark.

Mathew paused. Perhaps he ought to step to the door, it wouldn't take a second, and tell her that the bag was safe and sound, locked in the till. What a pity he had not brought it with him!

The house with the orange curtains was Mrs. Cooligan's house, as he had guessed. It was funny that such a small thing should have given him confidence, but when he saw the number on the fanlight, between the legs of the ornamental white horse that pranced without motion there, he felt that he was not a bad fellow at all to have picked out the right house from so far away.

The knocker on the door was made in the shape of a brass hand, and you banged it down on the door to gain admission, but Mathew had a certain timidity. It seemed like banging with your own fist. Fortunately there was also a bell. He decided on the bell. The bell was not one which you pressed inward with the pad of your finger. It had two small discs of

metal that came out from the door rather like the wings of a metal butterfly, and to ring the bell you squeezed the discs together. Mathew put up his hand and squeezed them together gently. Instantly there was a loud twitter of sound, almost in his ear it seemed to him, and all his confidence flew off with the vanishing twitters of the bell. When the door was flung open by Mrs. Cooligan, Mathew was utterly confused.

"Your bag!" he said, and that was all that he could say for a moment. "I came about your bag."

But Mrs. Rita Cooligan was not at a loss for words. "Come in!" she said, at once, before he had finished speaking. "Come in, Mr. Simmins. You're heartily welcome. How do you like my bell?" She pressed the discs together lightly as she spoke and filled the hallway with a twitter of bells. "It is entirely my own invention. Have you guessed the secret? It is only a bicycle bell, but I had a hole bored through the door so it could be rung from outside. I think myself it is a splendid idea; and so economical. Come in! Come in!"

Mathew felt there was no real occasion to go inside, but he was so confused by her talk, and by the bell sounds and by the barking of a large liver-and-white spotted dog which sat on the stairs, that he was inside the orange-curtained room and seated on an orange-covered settee before he got as far as telling her that he had found the bag. When she heard that it was found she was delighted.

"It was so good of you to call," she said. And then she said something else, but Mathew couldn't hear what it was because the dog began to bark again just then. He barked and barked, and he raised his eyes to the orange-shaded lamp and barked louder and louder.

"Be quiet, Pete," said Mrs. Cooligan. But Pete went on barking.

"Stop this at once, Pete!" said Mrs. Cooligan, and she lifted him up in her arms. "You mustn't bark at this nice gentleman. Mr. Simmins is a friend, Pete. Mr. Simmins found my bag, Pete."

The dog yielded to the warm hold of her arms and stopped barking. He looked at Mathew with his rich brown eyes and appeared to accept Mrs. Cooligan's estimate of him.

"Pat him," said Mrs. Cooligan. "Take his paw. He won't

bite. He's a dear. He'll make friends with you in no time, Pat him. Take his paw!"

She went to such trouble. Mathew was deeply touched. He had never patted a dog before. The dog was very silky. It was like stroking human hair. Though, as a matter of fact, he had never done that before, either, he thought; and he looked at the strong silk ripples of hair that went up from Mrs. Cooligan's smooth brow. While he was stroking Pete's paw, Mrs. Cooligan softly pulled Pete's other paw, and as Mathew felt the jerks of her hand stir the soft flesh of the dog, he felt as if she were touching himself, and although he knew he was stupid-looking, standing there without a word, he could do nothing else. He could think of nothing to say. He was unable to raise his eyes.

But she was a tactful woman; such a tactful woman. He had often heard that women had a great gift in this respect, but he had never seen it proved before. She began to talk to the dog in order to give him time to recover from his embarrassment.

"Did you ever meet such an honest man, Pete?" she said. "He could have run away with my bag!"

Pete looked up at her while she spoke and then he looked at Mathew. Mrs. Cooligan was delighted. She hugged him.

"See!" she cried. "He knows every word I say. He's wonderfully intelligent. He understands everything that is said to him. When my dear, dead husband knew that his days were numbered he picked up Pete one day and said that he was leaving me in his charge. 'I'm glad you will have poor Pete with you, Rita, when I am gone.' He knew he was going weeks before the end came. 'Pete will take care of you,' he said, several times. 'Pete won't let any harm come to you, Rita, my darling.' He was the best of husbands."

She buried her face in the soft folds of the dog's neck then, and didn't say anything more. The silence that Mathew dreaded began to leap into the room again. He made a great effort.

"About your bag . . ." he said, and after he had spoken he became more nervous than ever in case he had been too abrupt in breaking in upon her sorrow. He should have referred to her grief. He felt she was a brave woman. He wished that he had told her so. He longed to tell her so. He even wondered if

there was still time to say something to that effect. But Mrs. Cooligan had raised her head. She dropped Pete on to the floor softly, and she took up what he had said about the bag, quickly and courageously, speaking clearly without a trace of tears. He was filled with admiration for her self-control.

"Yes, indeed, my bag," she said. "I did not thank you for the trouble you have taken. I am deeply grateful. You saved me such suspense. I didn't care a fig for the ten pounds, but I would not have wished for the whole wide world to have lost my ivory paper knife. . . ."

"Ten pounds?" Did she say ten pounds? Mathew was startled. The blood beat in his temples.

"Ten pounds?" he said. "Do you mean to say there was that amount of money in the bag? Why didn't you mention the fact? Why didn't you tell me? Oh, my goodness! This is serious. The bag was on the floor. The clasp was open. I hope the money is safe!" He jumped up from the couch. He wiped his face with his brown-and-white dotted handkerchief.

"The money didn't matter," she said. "I told you the money didn't matter. It was my little souvenir I regretted. The money could have been replaced. The souvenir could never have been replaced." She shrugged her shoulders and Mathew saw that they were firm and round because she had some kind of lace thing on her. He wasn't reassured about the money, however. What a strange woman she was, that she didn't care about ten pounds, and yet she tried to be economical by putting that awful twittering bell on her door. He still felt as if there were a fly in his ear after it.

But it was serious about the money. He was afraid it had fallen out of the bag and was lying on the floor. A mouse might chew it.

"Was it a single note?" he asked, in fright.

"I really don't remember," she said. "It was two fives, I think. Wait a minute. Let me concentrate. Last week it was two fives, definitely. This week I think it was a single note. Yes! I believe it was a single note."

He hadn't time to digest his surprise at the size of the sum, because he was so worried for fear the note had fallen out of the bag and was lying on the shop floor.

"Mrs. Cooligan," he said, with desperate earnestness, "you

will understand that even though you are not worried about your money, I am worried. I was not responsible for it before I found it, but now it is in my charge and I really must go back and investigate whether or not the money is safe."

She caught her hands together.

"I won't have it," she said. "I won't have that at all. You will not go back all the way to the shop. I simply refuse to allow it." She ran to the door as she spoke, and threw her arms wide as if to prevent his leaving. She was smiling, but he knew that she was sincere. She was a charming woman. You would not have expected such a strong, mature woman to be so light-footed, so playful.

"I insist," he said.

"So do I!" she said.

"The money may be lying on the floor!" he said.

"Let it lie there!" she said. "It's not worth going back all this way in the dark. If it's there to-night it will be there to-morrow morning."

"You don't understand," said Mathew miserably.

"I understand one thing," said Mrs. Cooligan. "I understand that you are thinking of going back all that way without having had your supper! Isn't that so? You did not have anything to eat yet, after your long day's work?"

"I'm not hungry," said Mathew.

"Nonsense," said Mrs. Cooligan. "I know what men are! Of course you are hungry."

"I couldn't eat anything until my mind is set at rest," said Mathew.

Her arms must have been tired, spread out across the panels of the door, because she lowered them suddenly, and began to ruffle the heads of the big bronze chrysanthemums that were in a vase on top of the piano. He felt she had some purpose in the way she gave in to him so impulsively.

"If you must go, you must go," she said. "I know what men are! I'll let you go, but," she pointed her finger at him, "I warn you! I will have my revenge. I have it already planned."

She gave in to him so very swiftly that he was out in the street before he knew where he was; walking along very rapidly. He didn't feel chilly and stiff as he nearly always did in the

open air. He felt warm and comfortable, and up in the sky was a rich November moon, in bright orange.

On his way back with the bag, however, he felt the first empty chewing of hunger in his stomach. And as he went up the gravel path towards the prancing white horse on Mrs. Cooligan's fanlight, he was all at once tantalized by the most delicious odour of food that he had ever smelled in his life. It was not a definite smell of one thing or another, but a rich anonymous odour of meat and beautiful meat juices. When the door was opened for him the odour of food vanished and he decided that it had come from a neighbouring house. And yet there was a flush in Mrs. Cooligan's dark cheek, and through the lighted door of the room in which he had sat he could see there was a table laid for two people.

"The money is safe," he said, and he held out the bag.

"Now for my revenge!" she said. "You disobeyed me and the punishment is that you must stay and help me to eat my dinner."

He didn't have time to refuse. She was talking so fast and he was a bit tired, and, above all, he had to concentrate terribly hard to keep his hunger from becoming audible, as his stomach gnawed away emptily.

"I love to have my friends stay for a meal," she was saying. "When I am alone I never eat properly. Pete gets the best part of my dinner every other day. Don't you, Pete?" The dog beat the floor noisily with his tail. "When I am alone I content myself with tea. I have tea, tea, tea; nothing but tea. It does not seem worth while cooking for oneself alone, but when I have someone to cook for I do the most delicious things. Poor Arthur adored my steak-and-kidney pie." She stretched out her hands, as she spoke. "Give me your scarf. Give me your gloves."

Mathew had not fully realized that she was such a domesticated woman. That morning as he had watched her crossing the tram rails he had thought she was one of those strange women, as decorative as stuffed birds, who are kept as a luxury. He associated good cooking with landladies and slatternly wives.

But when he had sampled over a dozen delectable dishes in the orange-curtained room, week after week, and had several snacks in the kitchen when he had called without warning,

Mathew began to ponder once again upon the differences between men and women. But this time he felt that perhaps it was not too late, after all, to investigate them more fully.

If Mr. Simmins had never thought about marriage, that did not say that he was not romantic at the white core. He was. At least, he used to be. When he first came to the town he used to walk around and look at all the posters advertising soap and health salts and films for a camera. He used to imagine scenes in which one of the golden girls from a poster stepped down and linked him up the street. Ideas like that kept him from making friends, as a matter of fact, and it wasn't until he began to get tied up in the shop, trying to keep it in mind to order string and one thing and another, that he lost the habit.

There was one girl in particular on a big poster, right opposite Mahaffy's Stores. The poster was advertising bicycles, and there was a glorious girl with golden hair and blue eyes, with a red tam, and lovely, long legs, pedalling toward Mathew, right against the wind. Her hair blew about, beautifully. Her eyes were the very colour of the sky over her head.

Mathew was terribly romantic then. He used to pretend that he was going for long spins across the country with her. He was almost in love with her, but he kept himself in hand. It would have been a bit silly to fall in love with a girl on a poster. He was too steady to do that. If he wasn't so steady he wouldn't have gone to the top in Mahaffy's the way he did. You couldn't have everything.

Mathew, like most of his generation, was brought up in the firm belief that you cannot have everything, and so he never gave a thought to marriage from the day that Mr. Mahaffy (they used to call him "Young Mahaffy" in those days) took over the Stores and asked Mathew if he would carry on for him on more or less the same lines as those along which the old man had conducted things, and not to bother him, unless for money or financial advice.

Even now he wouldn't have thought of marriage if the thought of it had not flown across his path, asking to be caught, like a beautiful, bright bird from a foreign land.

Mathew wasn't too backward to see what Mrs. Cooligan had in her mind. He would never have thought of looking for a

woman for himself. He would not have known where to look. He would not have known what to say to one. He would not have had the presence of mind to think of a widow. It is likely that he would have looked for a girl like the girl on the poster long ago. And he would be too old for a girl like that. He even doubted if such girls were to be found nowadays. You never saw tams nowadays. You never saw blowy hair. And most girls on bicycles looked coarse.

But when a woman came up to him, and smiled at him, and leaned over the counter, like a big-breasted swan, and whispered a joke in his ear in a voice that the shop-boys couldn't hear her—well then, then marriage seemed easy.

Mathew more or less decided to let events take their course, and so the real heat of summer overtook himself and Rita as they were thinking about tea one Saturday afternoon. It was exceptionally hot, even for the month of July, and Rita suddenly whisked the cloth from the table and ran out into the garden and held up her hand.

"There's not a sign of rain," she said. "I think we will have tea in the garden." She ran back into the house. "Come on, Mathew," she said. "Come on, Pete." She pushed a cushion into Mathew's hand and gave Pete a bundle of papers to carry out in his mouth.

The sun shone steadily down on them as they drank their tea in the small garden, and the trellis belonging to the people who lived next door cast a green latticed shadow on the grass by the wall. But no green shadow fell on Mrs. Rita Cooligan. And when Mathew passed his cup for more tea he thought she looked very warm. He wondered if she would have looked cooler in something blue or green. He didn't like the ugly orange-coloured dress that she wore. Orange was a hot colour. Why did she always wear it? It made him feel hot just to look at it, so he gazed at the sky instead. The sky was beautifully blue. A tree, in another garden farther down the road, was beautifully green. He did not know that colour mattered so much, but when he looked back again at Rita, her dress made him push aside his tea and remark that he had heard that in America they iced their tea in summer-time.

"I'd give anything to go to America," said Rita.

"It's a long trip," said Mathew. "You couldn't do it under a hundred and fifty pounds."

"I might as well spend my money that way as any other way," she said. "Arthur said I was to have a good time. He said he was proud to leave me so well secured. He told me to be happy. But I wouldn't like to go on such a long journey alone. I don't think it would be pleasant to go alone, do you?"

"Oh, I don't know," said Mathew.

"Would you go alone?" she challenged.

"Oh, I don't know," said Mathew.

"Wouldn't you be lonely?" she said.

"Who would I be lonely for?" said Mathew. "I haven't any friends."

"Am I not a friend?" said Rita, and she looked as if she were going to cry.

"Oh, I wasn't thinking of you when I said that," said Mathew hastily.

"Would you be lonely for me?"

Mathew was irritated. "There isn't any question of my going," he said, "so what is the use of talking about it?" He passed his cup again. "I think I will have more tea, after all," he said.

Rita took the cup. "Will I spill out the cold dregs?" she said.

"Don't bother," said Mathew.

Rita looked into the half-empty cup.

"Oh, I will have to spill it out," she said. "There is a fly in it." She lifted the cup from the saucer and spilled the tea on the grass. The fly was not dead. When he felt the firm grass under his feet he shook the drops from his wings and sat on a blade of grass rubbing his little hands together as if he were celebrating his release. But he celebrated it too soon. Pete saw him. Pete made a snap at him. Mathew tried to save him by kicking Pete, but Pete was too quick, fat and all as he was, and Mathew was late. The fly was swallowed.

"Why didn't you take him out with a spoon?" said Mathew, crossly.

"Who?" said Rita.

"The fly," said Mathew.

"The fly!" said Rita and she laughed. "But they're such a

nuisance, Mathew. They get into everything, meat, butter, jam. . . .”

Mathew felt sick.

“Let’s not talk about it,” he said, suddenly, and he looked up again at the blue sky. It was so cool. It was so blue. It was so remote and so crystal-clear.

“Wouldn’t it be fun if we could go to America together?” said Rita. “I know I am being absurd to say such a thing, but I do think it would be fun! You are such wonderful company, Mathew. You see to everything. You are so capable. I’m sure you would make an excellent traveller. I am no use. I would get lost on the first street that I ventured on alone.”

“Oh, you’d get on all right,” said Mathew.

“Do you think I’d have a good time? Do you think I’d meet nice people?”

“I’m sure you would,” said Mathew.

“A cousin of mine went over there a few years ago and she met her fate on board ship!”

“What happened to her?” said Mathew, with a certain increase of interest.

“She met her fate!”

“So you said. But what does that mean?”

“Oh, you are funny!” said Rita. “Did you never hear that expression? It means she met the man she was going to marry. They were married on the other side, as a matter of fact, three days after the boat docked.”

“What were they doing until then?” said Mathew.

Rita looked at him and threw back her head with a hearty laugh. “You are so funny, Mathew. You say the funniest things!” And she laughed so much that the table shook and the cups rattled, and Pete sprang up into her arms and began to bark and lick her face. Mathew didn’t see what there was to laugh at, and he tried to drag Pete down from Rita’s lap. But Rita put her arms around the dog and hugged him closer.

“Isn’t he sweet?” she said. “He thinks I am upset and he wants to comfort me. He wants to show how much he loves me. He’s so clever. Pretend to hit me, Mathew, till you see the state he’ll get into. He’ll bark his head off. Pretend to hit me. He won’t bite. I won’t let him bite. Just let on to attack me and you’ll die laughing at the way he’ll carry on.”

"It's not right to irritate an animal," said Mathew.

"Oh, Pete is hardly an animal, he's the wisest old thing. Hit me! Hit me! Let on to raise your hand at me and you'll see how wise he is. You'll see the way he'll bark and jump at your face."

But Mathew never found it easy to pretend anything, and he said it was too hot. Rita held Pete tighter. For a while he was still, but then he began to struggle and freed his head. Mathew thought that Pete had freed his head in order to jump down on the ground, but Pete had only freed his wet black snout to lick Rita's face with a long tongue that looked to Mathew like a big, greasy piece of ham. He felt such discomfort in his stomach that he looked away rapidly, and stared hard, hard as iron, at the cold blue sky.

"Don't you think it's hot to have him in your arms?" he said, without looking downward.

"Too hot to cuddle Pete?" Rita put her large hand on the dog's fat white belly and rolled it round and round. "It's never too hot for me to cuddle poor old Pete. He's so fond of me, aren't you, Pete? I wish you'd let on to hit me, Mathew. It's so funny to see him trying to protect me. He gets so upset it's a treat to watch him, barking and jumping up to comfort me. Arthur said I could go anywhere with Pete and he'd protect me. I think I told you before, didn't I, that when poor Arthur was dying the very last thing he said was, 'I'm glad you have poor Pete. Pete will take care of you, Rita, my darling.'"

"Don't cry now, Rita," said Mathew, because he remembered that lately she cried whenever she spoke of Arthur.

"I wish you had met him, Mathew," she said. "I wish he had met you. I'd like you two to have met each other. Poor Arthur."

"He's happy, Rita, he's happy," said Mathew. "There's no need to feel bad about him."

And indeed Mathew had a strange feeling of quietude at the thought that Arthur was lying in the cold dark of the grave. Arthur was still and at rest, and his eye sockets were closed with clay. Mathew had looked up at the sky though, and not at the grass, when he told Rita not to be sad, and while he was looking up Pete sprang into his lap and began to lick his hand, and he could feel the workings of Pete's internal organs inside Pete's baggy belly.

"Get down! Get down!" he said, perhaps a little roughly.

"Come here, Pete! Come here!" said Rita, who had gone over to sit on the stone steps that led from the house to the garden.

"I think you don't like Pete," she said.

"I don't dislike him," said Mathew.

"But you don't like him! Poor Pete!" She caught the dog by the paw. "Never mind, Pete, my pet, I'll love you enough for two." Pete raised his head and banged his tail on the steps half a dozen times and then let his head down again on the hot stone of the steps.

"He loves the heat of the stone. It's quite hot. Feel it!" said Rita to Mathew. "Feel it! It's quite hot."

He felt the stone. It was hot. Everything was hot, except the trees way down the road, and the far, blue sky. There was a heavy stillness, and then Rita said she'd have to clear away the tea things.

"Leave them," said Mathew.

"I would if I thought the rain would keep off!" said Rita, holding out her hand, palm upward. "I'd hate dashing in with them if a sudden shower came down."

"It won't rain," said Mathew, without looking at the clouds. He knew it wouldn't rain. He felt that the cool exquisite rain was far, far away. "It won't rain," he repeated, and he felt that he could repeat it endlessly rather than exert himself to think of anything new to say. He had a longing to close his eyes and be silent. He suddenly thought that if he was married to her he would not have to be so polite all the time. He could close his eyes once in a while, and say he didn't want to talk. But if he did that now it would hurt her feelings.

Marriage ought to be a relief in a way; silences and slumping down in a chair. Mathew pondered this thought, but as he saw Rita's hand steal out and tweak Pete's ear, he had a vague apprehension that Rita might not feel the same way as he did about marriage. He didn't know what exactly she might take marriage to mean. He wanted desperately to know, all of a sudden, but it was a tricky subject for conversation and one on which it would be hard to talk without committing oneself.

Rita tweaked Pete by the ear again. "Isn't he sweet? He sleeps at the foot of my bed," she said.

"Let him sleep," said Mathew.

"He doesn't want to sleep. Do you, Pete?" She pulled Pete up on to her lap again, but he wriggled down and lay flat on the steps. He was beginning to feel the heat. His tongue lolled out in a tremble of heavy breathing. Mathew felt that he could have done the very same himself. It was getting hotter instead of cooler as the day wore on.

"Will the butter melt?" he said, suddenly, sitting up and looking at the table.

"I think I'll take it inside," said Rita. "I think I'll clear the table after all. It will leave us more time to talk afterward."

When Rita got up Pete got up, and when she went into the house Pete went in after her, heavily. Pete was hot, and Pete was no pup. Mathew felt sort of sorry for Pete.

But when he looked at the step where Pete had been lying and saw it flicked all over with the wet marks of Pete's lolling tongue he felt a nausea that may have been coming on for the last hour, and, although the flicks were drying out, and were hardly to be seen a minute later, Mathew felt that he would have to get away by himself somewhere, quickly, and fight off the attack. He looked up at the sky, but it held no coolness for him now. His eyes were affected and the sky and the trees and the grass, and the trellis and the lattice shadow of the trellis, were all the one colour, an ugly orangey brown. He could hardly see the door. He didn't even dare to call out and tell Rita that he felt sick. She'd want him to take something. She'd want him to lie down. The thought of swallowing anything was terrible. The thought of lying down on the orange couch appalled him. The dog was lying on it the night he first called at the house. He didn't wait to tell Mrs. Cooligan that he was going. He ran through the dining-room into the hall, and when he got into the street he crossed at once to the shady side. He felt quite chilly almost at once, and rather stiff at the knees. But the coolness was wonderful. Already he could see much clearer.

The houses were cold and grey. The railings were cold and black. And when he stared at it for a moment, after passing his handkerchief over his eyes, the sky was brilliantly blue again, and clear and calm and cooling. But this time he noticed that his handkerchief was an ugly dirty colour, and he stopped

at a draper's, there and then, to buy a new one, a new white one, because he wanted to feel the cold white glaze that was always on new white linen.

He wanted everything to be cool and clear, and when he reached the house where he lodged he liked the clear clarion of the bell that sent a single peal through the lower part of the house and left no echo. He liked the cold air that was in his bare room, and he liked the cold feel of his laundered counterpane.

And just as he hadn't thought about marriage until very recently, he hadn't thought about death either. But he thought of it then, in his cold, damp room, and the coldness and darkness of death appealed to him as the shade of a tree might do. Life was hot and pulsing and it brought out a sweat on the forehead. He didn't know anything about marriage, but it must be close and pulsing also.

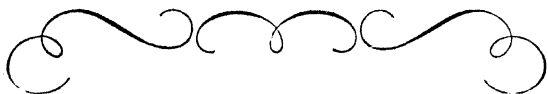
The dog on the hot steps, with his warm, wet tongue, panting and smelly, had given him nausea. Life was nauseating to him. Death was cool and fragrant. Of course, he had a long time to go yet before its green shade lengthened to reach him. But, in the meantime, he could keep away from the hot rays of life, as he had always done before he got familiar with Rita.

She was the feather-breasted king of person who wanted warmth all the time. A husband wasn't enough, she had to have a dog; she had to have cushions. He wouldn't be any good to a woman like that. He wasn't cut out for marriage. He was so thin, in the first place. His feet were icy most of the time.

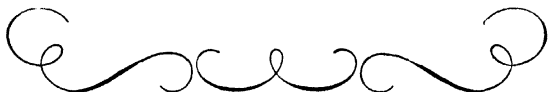
But late that night, as Mathew looked out at the moon, he remembered the girl on the poster with the blowy hair and the slender legs, and he thought that he might have found marriage sweet and cool and fragrant if he had married a girl like that, but he had left the gilt sunlight of romance years and years ago, and it seemed that you couldn't ever go back.

You couldn't go back, ever. And that was what he had been trying to do. There was probably a fragrant life where love was no warmer than white winter sunlight, but since he had not found it, he wasn't going to put up with anything less, just for the sake of comfort. Death was the next important step and it was through sweet cemetery grasses, over cold grave-stones.

He lay in his chill, white bed, and he watched the moon; young, slender; a beautiful cool green moon.



“ Say could that lad be I ? ”



This is my father's story. It isn't mine at all. I wrote it down one night, so soon after hearing him tell it that I remembered every word. My father is not a man to bother writing a thing down, unless it's a message to pin on the stable door for the herd, or the boy that feeds the dogs. He's not exactly a talking man either, unless about horses and hurdles. Most of his yarning goes on in his head, while he walks the Meath fields, or leans over the gate of a yellow pasture. When I am in Dublin I think of him as I have so often seen him, standing in a dusty yellow field, or a green field tufty with clover clumps, staring at a cropping beast, or just walking along scotching thistles with a walking stick.

My father is always busy with his hands, tying back a rambling brier that would scratch the eyes out of the galloping colts, or pulling down the choking strings of ivy from the bark of a young tree. In Meath a man must restrain the lovely fertile land, or it will strangle him with its greenery. But in Roscommon, where my father was born, the fields capriciously point up their chaste rocks through the grass and defy man to win them wholly to his way.

Poverty in the west of Ireland has the dignity of a losing cause well fought. When my father talks of his barefooted boyhood in blue Roscommon, it seems very far away. He seems to be a different person from the boy he tells me about. Perhaps we are different people, all of us, from the children we once were, as we are different people from the men we dream ourselves to be. Perhaps when we sit and think of things

we did long ago there is no idle egotism in our musings, but rather the unselfishness of thoughts about another person ; a person we once knew.

I think my father finds it hard himself to believe that the boy he calls to mind was once himself, as hard as that boy would have found it to believe, had he had the power to look ahead, that he would one day be this wise and quiet man who wouldn't want to cross a stile if there were a gate, and who would go out into a field at evening time just to stare at the grass, and want no more.

But if he doubts that the lad he remembers could be himself, the story about that lad is his. As I said, it is not mine. It is his, even in the way one word goes before another.

Did I ever tell you about a dog I had, my father asked ; a dog by the name of White Prince ? He was the wonderfulest dog in the world. He was a cross between a wire-haired terrier and a bloodhound, and he was pure white, with the hair bristling on him when he smelled a fight. A dog was no good to a fellow in those days if he wasn't a good fighting dog. That was all we kept dogs for, to set them on each other. Every fellow in the village had a dog, and the fellow that had a dog to beat all the other dogs was a fellow that was looked up to over the whole countryside.

I used to have great dogs. But White Prince was about the best I ever had. One day I was sent over the fields to my grandmother's house, that was seven miles away from where my own mother lived. I set off over the fields, and kicking sods of dry grass that were thrown up by the hooves of a clattering mare that was always breaking loose over anyone and everyone's few acres. I brought the white dog along with me for company. I wasn't going to go seven miles without him, although my grandmother hated the sight of him, and well I knew it.

We got to my grandmother's house about two o'clock in the afternoon. I remember well it was drawing in towards winter and the evenings were getting very short. Although it was only two o'clock, the night was beginning to show in the sky a bit already. My grandmother was sitting on the side of an old settle bed, and she said she was sitting there waiting for me for the last two hours. I came to do her messages for her in the

next village, that was farther along the road, but nearer a lot than the one I came out of, all the same.

"Take care would you think of taking that blaggard of a dog into the village with you," said the old lady. She knew he'd fight every dog in the village, and that he wouldn't come home till he did ; nor me either.

"And take care would you think of leaving him here either," she said as an afterthought.

I didn't know what to do. I thought it over for maybe a minute, and I decided that perhaps it was just as well not to bring my brave fighter into a village that was strange to him. I got a sudden idea. I called the dog into the house and waited till my grandmother turned to the dresser to get out her knitting. Then I went out quickly, stopping the dog from coming after me by blocking the door with the butt of my boot. When I was outside and the door shut I drew down the hasp. There used to be a hasp on the outside of the door on most houses, and when it was caught down no one who was inside could get out. It seems queer, now that I come to think of it, but it seemed the most natural thing in the world then.

When I put down the hasp my grandmother and the dog were locked inside, and my mind was at rest on one score anyway. My grandmother was a kind woman at heart, and even if that was not the case, she was very feeble, and so I knew that she wouldn't lift a hand to the dog. There was only one thing she would do to him if she could, and that was the one thing I made it so that she couldn't do ! She couldn't let him out and stray him on me.

I went down the pebbly lane, whistling and as happy as could be, jingling the coins in my trouser pocket and feeling a very big fellow, when all was said and done. I was only halfway down the lane when I heard a shower of splintering sounds behind me, and I looked around in time to see my fighting dog come leaping out into the air from a gaping hole in the window, and he glittering with sparks of broken glass, and he leaving behind him on the sill two reeling pots of red geraniums.

I didn't take time to stop, but I went running down the lane, not a whistle in my throat, and White Prince barking and yelping and snapping at my heels with his pride and his

joy and his devilment. The more I ran the more frightened I got, and the more the dog ran the more excited he got. When we got in sight of the village I stopped running and sat down on a stile, and took out the silver shilling my grandmother gave me, and the five heavy coppers. Fast and all as we ran, I hadn't lost the money. I looked at it for a long time and I felt a bit better then, and I felt some of the importance creeping back into me that I felt when I set out from the door after putting down the hasp. I started to compose in my mind the way I'd ask in the shop for my messages, but when I tried to remember what they were I couldn't for the life of me remember as much as one of them. I was afraid to go back and ask my grandmother to tell me them again.

I'll get her tea and sugar, I decided, and a loaf of bread, and if there's any money left I'll get her a piece of bacon. She'll be so mad about the broken window when I go back, she won't open the messages till after I'm gone. I was sorry I reminded myself of the broken window, because the thought of it gave me a queer feeling. I looked around at the dog, thinking to give him a kick by way of thanks for all the trouble he got me into, but he was sitting in the middle of the road looking up at me, with his head cocked to one side and his ear cocked up the other side. I hadn't the heart to touch him. I couldn't think to do anything more than give him a whistle to get up and come along with me, and we made for the main street of the village, walking along together as great pals as ever we were.

It was dark by this time and the lamps were being lit up in the shop windows. I could see the dark shadows of the shop-boys kneeling into the window spaces in every shop, trimming up the wick and striking matches and putting down the globes over the flame. The lights were hanging from the ceilings, and after they were lit they swung back and forth a few minutes, sending big unnatural shadows, of the boys and the things in the window, out over the path in a way that would make you scared to look at them. I looked into the shops instead, where the steady yellow lights on the walls were comfortable and homely, and the crinkly tin reflectors behind them reminded me of the kitchen at home.

I went into the biggest shop in the street. It was a drapery

shop on one side, but on the other side they sold tea and sugar and bread, and boxes of things and sweets out of jars, and a good many things I never saw anywhere else but there. There was a window on the grocery side, and it was filled with plates of raisins and plates of flour and plates of rice and plates of prunes. The window on the drapery side was filled with ladies' bonnets and caps, and yards of lace and coloured tape and strings of black and brown bootlaces. I liked doing messages in this big shop. We hadn't any as big as it in our own village. I liked looking into the glass cases, and I liked looking at the big lamps as long as they were still and not swinging their shadows over me. Most of all I liked listening to the whirl and spin of the great ball of twine inside the tin canister with the hole in it, every time the shop-boy gave the end of the string a tug and drew out enough to tie up a parcel. And I liked the noise of the money rattling about in the drawer under the counter, when he drew it out to give someone change.

This evening I was so happy looking around me and taking notice of everything, I didn't heed what my brave fighter was doing for himself. He was smelling around when I saw him last, and, as long as no other dog came into the shop, I felt it was safe enough to let him smell around all he liked. But, as I was leaning on the counter watching the boy making up the price of my messages, I felt something bristly brush by my bare legs, and I looked down in time to see the white stump of my bold dog's tail disappearing under the counter. There was a space between two of the counters, so that shop-boys could get in and out if they wanted, but there was a board across the opening, so that you had to lift it up to get in or out. That kept out people that had no business behind the counter, because you couldn't raise up the board without causing attention. It gave a creak and, as well as that, it darkened over the side of the shop for a minute while it was being lifted. You could be leaning on the board when it was down and you might never know there was a passage underneath you all the time, if you didn't happen to look close. But White Prince wasn't the sort to miss much, and he didn't miss the half door in the counter. He went inside, and I held my breath.

He was very quiet for a long time, then all of a sudden one

of the boys bent down to pick up a penny he let drop, and he must have seen the white stump of a tail wagging away in the delight of the darkness under the shelves, because he let a yell out of him. He yelled at the poor dog and started ordering him to get out of that, by stamping his feet and waving a sweeping brush at him that he picked up in a fit of rage. I don't know what he caught the poor dog doing, but whatever it was it must have been something he shouldn't have been doing, because the fellow was in a terrible temper. He was yelling at the dog to get out, but he was standing up against the hole in the counter blocking the way out all the time he was yelling, and I suppose the poor dog thought he was cornered. I suppose he was sure and certain the fellow would kill him with the big brush he was waving at him. You never know what an animal is thinking, but they have very clever ideas. When White Prince saw there was no regular way out I suppose he started planning on getting out some irregular way. I suppose he said to himself, If a trick is worth doing once it's worth doing twice! Anyway however it was with the dog in his own mind, the next thing I saw was the flashing fighter rising up in the air and leaping into the window, knocking the bonnets right and left and slapping up against the glass with a crash. There was a worse sound of splintering than I heard a while before in the lane at my grandmother's, and there was a ten times heavier shower of splinters as he went flying out into the street with his four paws stiff out under him and streamers of lace and ribbon and tape trailing out after him into the yellow square of path that was lit up by the shop lamps. I was struck cold with fright. I couldn't lift up a foot from the boards of the floor, much less get out of the shop. I thought as true as God I'd be put in prison for life. The shop was in an uproar, everyone running out and shouting and holding up their hands and whistling for the dog to come back with one breath, and with the next breath calling God to witness what they'd do to him if he did. They were shading their hands and looking out into the blackness of the road the way the dog went. You could easy see the way he went, because he left a streal of muddy tapes and bonnet-strings behind him halfway out into the road, and maybe farther down the road too, if it was bright enough to see, but it wasn't.

The shopkeeper himself was dividing his time between shaking his fist into the dark and running over to the window and pushing back the bonnets and blouses through the hole in the glass.

There was a terrible lot of talk, I needn't tell you. Everyone was asking everyone else how much they thought the cost of the glass would be, and the women were asking each other if they thought the things that got muddy would be sold off cheap. I could hear the talk, coming in through the open door, and I suppose the hole in the window made it sound louder inside too. I heard everything without going out. I was afraid to put one foot before another in the direction of the door or the window. I never once questioned the fear that was chilling me into stupidity, the fear of being cuffed off to prison as soon as the boy came back with the dog. I might have run off like the dog, if I had had my change; but I thought it as bad to go back to my grandmother without that, as I did to go to prison with the dog. So, I just stood still and waited, and, when there was nothing being said worth listening to, I just cursed the dog and planned what I'd do to him when I got him again. But the thought that I might never get him again softened some of the punishments into pats on the head and, if I could only have got out of the place with my change, I wouldn't have hurt a hair on his head when I found him. There was a sound of hammering, after a bit, and I saw the shopkeeper nailing up boards over the broken window, and then he came in and threw me a piece of paper, and pushed over a bottle of ink to me with a pen sticking up in it, and said I was at school long enough to know how to write. "Write down BUSINESS AS USUAL," he said. But the boy that had gone looking for the dog came back and took the pen out of my hand and wrote it himself. His breath was bursting his ribs, and he leaning over the counter writing, and I thought to myself that, if only I had my change, now was my time to beat it while the chap was winded. "Wait a minute, young fellow," said he to me just then, "I'll have your change for you in a tick."

It didn't sound, by the way he spoke, as if he was going to put me in prison. Maybe they're only going to punish the dog, I thought, and I felt sorrier than ever for White Prince.

"Here's your change," said the boy; "see is it right, I don't remember quite what I had to take out of it."

He counted over the parcels again and found the change was right. I started for the door, but just as I got near it the shopkeeper let a bawl out of him. "Come here!" he said. "Come here, young fellow. Which way are you going out of the town?" I was too stiff to answer him, so he went on. "Whichever way it is, anyway," said he, "keep an eye out for a tinker with a white dog. I'll give you sixpence if you come back with news of him."

"I'll bet it's worth more than sixpence to him to find out who owns that dog!" said one of the people outside as I went through the crowd. "He was white all to an odd spot of black I think," said the shopkeeper, coming to the door and shouting out after me. "He was all white, sir," I said before I felt myself saying it. "There was no black on him at all."

"Is that so?" said the man. "Well, it's good to know that. You've a good pair of eyes." He stopped and looked at me. "That information is worth something I think?" he said, looking around at the customers and thinking to encourage some of them to give me some information about the dog. "That information is worth a bag of sweets, anyway," he said, and he went inside and filled up a white tissue bag, so full that the mitred mouth of it was too full to close over and so he swung the bag over and over by the two top edges, till it had two little ears sticking up on it. But the ears made me think of the dog, the way he was sitting on the road when we stopped outside the village, and I wished again that I'd given him the clips I was planning on. I took hold of the bag of sweets though, and I pelted off down the road towards my grandmother's, and I can tell you it was no snail's pace I went when I got round the corner.

According as the road between me and the shop was growing longer, the thought of the broken window of the shop was getting less troublesome; but according as the road between me and my grandmother's house was getting shorter, the thought of her broken window was getting blacker before my eyes. But I was glad to be out of the village, anyway, and I was glad the dog had gone home too, because it would have ruined everything if he came running up to me wagging his tail

before I got out of the place. If he did that there wouldn't be one that wouldn't know he was my dog, and there wouldn't be one that wouldn't be after me. I'd have no chance at all against so many, and some of them with bicycles.

"I'm glad he went home," I said to myself. "I hope he doesn't lose himself."

I didn't need to worry. As I came out of the village past the last tree before the open fields, I heard a growling in the dark ahead of me and a scuffling on the gravelly road. The nearer I got, the louder the snarling got, but no matter how loud it got, the loudest snarl in all the snarling was the snarling of White Prince. As I got near the fighting fury of the dogs my eyes got used to the dark, and I saw White Prince shining white against the hedge on the side of the road. He was up on a rise of the ditch bank, and there was a half-circle of dogs around him and he was barking at them and baring his teeth. Not one of the other dogs would go an inch nearer to him, but not one of them would go an inch back from him either. Then, White Prince heard my footsteps, I think, because he took courage. He gave a fiercer snarl than any that went before, and he picked up something in his teeth from the grass beside him and made off suddenly down the road, with all the other dogs after him barking fit to wake the dead. That was the very way I put it to myself that night, I remember. "Let them wake every corpse that ever was planted," I said to myself, "as long as they don't draw down the living on me." And I looked back at the last few lights of the village, that winked through the hedges at me. I ran after the dogs and I caught up with them after a bit. White Prince had stopped again and ran up on another mound of the ditch. The half-circle of mangy curs was around him again. He left down his precious load, whatever it was, and gave me a look as much as to say, "What are you standing there for? Beat off these devils of dogs, will you, and come and look at what I have here!" I felt it was time, right enough, to put a stop to things as they were, and I took up a stick and began to beat off the dogs. It was no easy job, but they went off one by one, and left only one lanky yellow cur that was as hard to shake off as twenty dogs. He slunk off forty times and he slunk back again another forty times, till at last I got a good crack at him by throwing the stick out of my

hands. He let out a yell, at the scudding clouds, and off with him where he came from.

"Come on now, you!" I said to White Prince, and I started off for my grandmother's house. I forgot that he had been carrying something, but after a while I began to think it strange that he wasn't frisking along in front of me, and I thought, too, that he was making a dragging sort of noise behind me. I looked around, and there was the poor dog, staggering under the weight of something big and bulky that he had hanging out of his jaws.

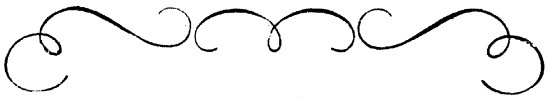
"What have you there, you blaggard?" I said, and he dropped it down at my feet. What do you think it was? A big leg of mutton! White Prince stared up at me. His little bright eyes were glinting at me, and his tail was wagging like a bush in the wind.

I was ready to kill him there and then on the road, for the robber and thief he was, when all of a sudden I remembered my grandmother who was waiting for me, and I remembered too that she might still be hasped into the house, which would make her ten times madder with me than before. I got an idea.

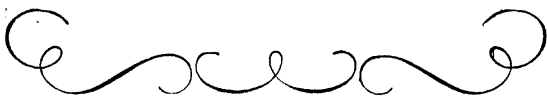
"Good dog!" I said, patting him on the head.

"Come on!" I shouted, jumping up on the ditch and over the stile in the wall, with my parcels under one arm and the leg of mutton under the other.

May God forgive me, I washed that leg of mutton in a stream of clear spring water, and before my grandmother had time to know that I was inside the house at all I had the leg of mutton planted down on the kitchen table. While she was exclaiming about it I ran out again where the white fighter was waiting for me, and half a hundred stars as well, that had slipped out without my noticing them. We went home again over the fields, and I remember well noticing that the hoof-cuts in the field had filled in with rain, during the shower that we had missed while we were inside the shop, and there seemed to be a star in every rut. I was very happy too, I remember, and the white dog ran along with me as giddy as the stars in the puddles. If that dog was as happy as me, he had no conscience either.



A Fable



She was the most beautiful woman they had ever seen and so they hated her. The women feared that she would dim their own glory, and the men disliked her because they felt she was inaccessible, even to the strongest and most fierce of them. The women need not have feared, for the orchid does not take from the beauty of the bluebell. The men need not have disliked her because they could not possess her body, for had they been wiser men than they were they would have realized that a woman of such incandescent beauty belonged to every eye that looked on her. So the beauty of Helen had belonged to every man in Greece, and Menelaus had no greater desire to drag her back from Troy across the coiling waters than had the least man among the men of Greece, hammering the curved boards, banging the singing rivets. But the men in the village where this beauty came to live were not wise men, nor were they generous, nor were they kind.

There is no need to try to describe her face, for faces such as hers cannot be described, except by some idea like the idea we have been given of the face of Helen by the man who said that it launched a thousand ships. You may say of her, if you wish, that she was like a bough of apricot blossom. She came to the village quietly one evening after dusk, to live in the house of her fathers that had been shut up for nearly a generation. She came without warning, and that in itself was a mark against her with the people of the countryside. The first they saw of her was on the top of a long and insecure ladder climbing up on to the roof of her house and poking at the lichen cushions on the tiles with a little cane. She was wearing trousers like a man and the lines of her lovely body were

seen in silhouette against the blue breast of the sky. Her face was framed in the gold lace of her hair. She was beautiful every hour of the day, but in the early sunlight she was perhaps most beautiful, and the villagers got the full impact of her star-shining beauty upon their shrinking and unprepared eyes. They all saw her. The demesne was on a hilly ridge of the valley and so they all saw her. They felt a shock run through their bodies at the sight of her. They did their work badly all that day, as men and women do who work after the gusts of a great emotion have subsided and left an inexpressible lassitude of spirit and of body.

Next day they were themselves again, with energy to satisfy their curiosity about the newcomer. There was not much to be found out except that she intended to live in the old house permanently. She was reticent, but that was quickly translated into ungracious. She was going to have the house redecorated. That meant, to the minds of the people in the valley, that she was a spendthrift. They further decided that, as like as not, she would give big parties when the house was ready and that they would be attended by young and very gay people. That meant that she was fast. And so the legend grew that this exquisite creature was hateful in mind and heart. It was indeed a pity that she did not have one small flaw, even one. If one little ivory shell of her teeth were only turned or crooked they might have found her more human. If once in a while, even once, in the April of every year when the chemists in the valley put sarsaparilla in their windows, if, even then, she had one spot on her skin, they would not have been so grudging of praise whenever she passed them on the roads. But not one single flaw had she, and as she cantered over the fields the wind and rain could only blush and never redden her cheeks; they could cluster and tangle, but never untidy, her hair.

Every day she rode along the roads, and if she sometimes shyly smiled at any of the people she met on the wayside they hurried home to tell their friends how she had sneered at them. Her own friends came from the city, and the windows in the big house on the hill were lit all night and patterned over with the passing and repassing of human figures. Presumably her friends were fond of her, although when their cars came careering into the market square, and they wanted to know the

way to her house, they were not always careful, or just, in the description they gave of her in order to show who they meant and whose home they sought. Some of these friends were very pretty, too. The postmistress who lived just in the square, and who always rushed out into the dusty road to tell the drivers the way, before the wife of the haberdasher across the street could open her door to get out, gave it as her opinion that there was one very handsome girl among her friends. This girl was dark-haired with soft peach-skin cheeks. She had a clear-cut profile, and she would have been perfect only for a small cast in her left eye. The whole village was interested in the beautiful girl with the cast in her eye. When the people saw her at the Meet of the Harriers they were delighted with her. "The poor girl. It was such a pity about her eye, because she was so beautiful." They stood around the Town Hall to watch the riders and the hounds pass by, into the copse behind the demesne. They noticed with satisfaction that there were more gentlemen talking to her than talked to any other woman, and that there was always one ready to slip from his mount and do her a service; light her cigarette, tighten her girth-strap, or pick up her fallen whip. There was one other girl who was very popular, and she also was a guest from the big house. The gentlemen from the surrounding county seemed to be very attentive to her also. And she was very pretty too. As the postmistress said, she would have been nicer than the dark girl if only her nose were not a little too long. And she had a lovely expression. On that they were all agreed. In fact it was doubtful whether those who were mounted or those who were watching their performances had the greater enjoyment that morning at the first Meet of the year. The enjoyment of the villagers, and perhaps that of an odd person here and there among the members of the Hunt, was increased by an added pleasure later in the day, when the beautiful owner of the big house on the hill was forced to dismount at one point of the road and open a gate for herself. There had seemed to be no one on the spot at the moment, or no one was looking her way. No one looking her way, I think. When she was on the ground and pulling off her yellow string gloves to open the wire knot that served as a lock, one or two of the gentlemen rode up and were about to help her, but she had

opened the gate and was already leading the mare through. It did not seem worth while to knot up the wire for her, anyway she was nearly finished doing it up for herself. What extraordinary hands she had, like the unbelievable unflawed plaster hands of the draper's dummies! And watching the swiftly moving hands the men thought of the hands of wives and sweethearts that they had kissed and caressed, and strangely enough those hands were either red or slightly chapped or indeed definitely stubby.

To tell the truth, the perfection of this fabulously beautiful girl was really beginning to get on the nerves of the whole neighbourhood. If only she had managed to look tired after those energetic rides across country the spell might have been broken earlier than it was, but when she looked tired her eyes were deeper than the pools of the bog, and the blue veins that faintly beat in her forehead made her skin more like porcelain than ever. The veins were like the blue mark of the potter's underglaze. She looked more lovely than ever, but of course by this time what had unconsciously irritated everyone was the one thing that they would not admit to exist. In short, before very long, no one for miles away from the big house was aware that a face such as only forms in flesh once every hundred years had come to gaze on, and be gazed upon by, them.

Then one day when the Hunt was once more meeting at the square and the beautiful girl came riding down the hilly lawn from her house, an accident occurred. It was very slight, but it had a deep effect on the hearts and minds of the people who witnessed it. She had ridden down the hill, and those who had seen her coming through the branching trees were preparing to stare at her insolently as she sailed over the ditch that divided her own demesne from the tree-shaded village street where the horses and riders, the hounds and the spectators, were gathered. She rose in the air and with sure feet the mare brought her forelegs clear of the thorny bank. It was, as usual, a clean and graceful jump, and no one was prepared for the unexpected way the high-hanging strand of bramble switched her face.

The branch of brier switched her face and its thorns tore into her flesh. With the force of the slashing twig she was thrown from her mount, and with the pain of its lashing sting

she lay where she fell, silent, still, face-upward in the grass-tangled ditch. Her eyes were closed like the eyes of an old-fashioned china doll, and her lashes lay flat on her cheeks in an adorably old-fashioned way. Her hair was spread around her seemingly sleeping face like a fine gold filigree fan, and some strands still clung upwards caught on the thorns of the undergrowth, taut wires of finely spun white gold.

Everyone in the street seemed to see the accident in its least details. And perhaps the momentousness of her beauty and the momentousness of it having come among them dawned on their slow and dull-eyed minds, for they acted with a dignity beyond the power of prophecy to foresee in their heavy faces one moment before this moment. They did not rush. They did not shout or scream. Slowly they came over towards the ditch where she lay, like figures in a play acting at the will of some artistic producer rather than at the catcall of their instinct to stare at blood.

For the blood that had crept into the scratches and weals on her face had come slowly too, but with more sinister advance from cut to cut, until on the pale white porcelain cheek there was a blood etching of the brier branch itself.

After the first moments of unnatural calm, the wonder in the eyes of the villagers gave place to a sudden pity in their hearts, and that gave way to the skill and strength of their limbs as they lifted her up on strong shoulders and, wordlessly, carried her back to her house on the hill.

All day the image of her face as they had last seen it stayed in the minds of those people, and the colours and contours of things habitually in their minds ran together all day long to make images of what they had seen in slightly different forms. So, when the postmistress pressed down the deckle-edged and bright red stamp upon a white vellum envelope, she shivered. For her mind had made a new image of the porcelain skin with the brier etching on the face of a girl so beautiful that the postmistress let her tears fall freely on an envelope that had cost more to the dozen than her own black blouse. And when the gardener at the convent was picking a red lady-bug from the frail white petals of a winter cyclamen, he sighed and thought he had never seen a more beautiful thing in all this world and in all his life than this white cyclamen petal,

and nothing more cruel or more frightening than this red-backed insect that he flung to the ground in disgust. For, although he did not know it himself, he was thinking of a face in a ditch. And the schoolmaster went to his bookcase that day and took down *Macbeth*, although he did not particularly like it, and could not say to save his soul why he wanted to read it again. But when he came to the description of Duncan's death, he surprised himself by exclaiming "Ah . . . here it is!" as he drew a pencil mark along the famous lines that tell how Duncan's silver skin was laced with his golden blood. He left the book open at that page and took out a cambric handkerchief to wipe his glasses. And the draper's wife, who had wrung the neck of a pure white pullet and seen the jet of red spurt over the silken feathers, had said that life was very cruel. The whole village felt that life was very cruel, and so they lined themselves up as allies of its most pitiful victim.

For she was pitifully scarred. After staying in a shaded room for three weeks she had come out one day determined to ignore the markings on her skin. It happened—for life is full of unrelated coincidences—that she had long been threatening to go up on the roof and see, if she could, whether or not there was room for a skylight between the two chimneys on the east side of the library. And for the first time since her fall the people down in the streets saw her, and it might almost have been the first day that she came among them, for they paused to look up at her figure against the blue, and they said they had never seen anyone or anything more beautiful; and that she would be the most beautiful girl in the world if it were not for her scarred face. And the postmistress called a messenger boy and told him to go up to the big house and tell the mistress that the letter she had sent to be posted that morning, the letter to the doctor in Vienna, was not sufficiently stamped. It was none of her business of course, but she was sure that the young lady wouldn't want such an important letter to be understamped. It must be important. It was probably a letter about her face to some clever foreign doctor. As the boy went up the hill she watched the figure on the distant roof. She was curling around the chimney pots like a great cat; light, deft, lithe, sleek and lovely. Those were the words of the schoolmaster and not the postmistress, for he too

was watching her. He wondered how she managed for books; his were old, of course, but at any rate he'd mention it to her house steward, would say to him that she was welcome to any of his, he could make out a list of them some night, or perhaps if she was passing the schoolhouse some day he could give the children transcription, or perhaps she'd come after school hours? . . . But no . . . better when the children would be there, because it would not be right that the breath of shame should fan such a lovely creature. It was really too bad about her face, only for that . . .

Her face was worse than might be imagined from the nature of the accident, but there were two reasons for this : firstly, the force with which she rode against the lash of the thorn was so great that the skin was displaced and had to be sewn; secondly, fine porcelain cracks easier than delft, and shows the mark of its mending. But if the villagers had been unable to bear the beauty of her unscarred face they seemed to long for the sight of her now. If a farmer's lad delayed and dallied with his fork or harrow when he saw her coming to a closed gate it was not in order to humiliate her into opening it herself, but in order that she might be forced to alight and be nearer to him as he ran with well-timed speed to fumble the wire lock, and mumble his regrets at not being quicker. And if he did not get there in time he would have a little spray of violets or a soft showery branch of pussy willow in his hat, and he would pull it out and offer it to her as naturally as if she were his sweetheart and they had lain in the hay together. And that evening he would say to his mother that she was a very civil lady and that if it wasn't for that mark on her face she'd be the finest lady in the land. And his mother would ask how her cheek looked, and the boy would say there was no sign of blood on it now at all, but her skin was all puckered up. "I know," his mother would assure him, "like the grooves in a carving dish." "See," she would say, and take one down from the dresser and show him the way a branching rill was made in the china to let the gravy flow into one well. And he had nodded that it was exactly like that, but whether he meant the colour and smoothness of the skin or the scar on the skin he did not really indicate. And he would tell his mother how he had given her the flowers, and his mother would boast about it to

the rest of the villagers, for they all loved her dearly and were glad to serve her. Were it not for the scar on her face, would she not be the most beautiful girl in all the land?

For two years she lived quietly in the valley, beloved by all those who dwelt in it with her. Then one day she got a letter from the doctor in Vienna (and, although it is not important, let it be recorded that it was insufficiently stamped) saying that he was of the opinion that by now an adequate length of time had been let lapse since the wounds had been made, and that the time had come when it would be safe and advisable to have new skin grafted over the scars. She told the people in the valley, and they were glad, and they lit candles for her safety in the chapel on the hill. They went to the station to see her off, and one little cripple boy threw white heather into the smoky little carriage of the train as it left the station, noisily and fussily. Her pale and serene face was pressed to the plate-glass window to see the last of the kind but stupid folk, and they thought how beautiful she would be were it not for the unfortunate mark on her cheek.

All the time that she was away they kept candles lighted before the shrine of the Beautiful Virgin, who was indeed very beautiful and would be more so still were it not for the fact that the paint from Her blue mantle had run a little and stained Her face a rather dark colour. They prayed that the girl would not be hurt by the foreign nurses and the foreign doctor, and they prayed that she would not be scarred worse when she returned. But for her return to beauty and perfection they did not pray, because they did not believe that such a thing was possible, and furthermore they did not remember what she looked like when she was perfect, and still furthermore they had loved her as she was. So when, one day, and unexpected, she arrived at the little station and walked up the street, the people ran out of the shops and the children ran out of the schools, and her mare put her bay head over the wall of the demesne, and all with excited clamour welcomed her home. But, since as in all public demonstrations of this kind they spoke more to each other than to her, and looked almost exclusively at each other rather than at her, she had passed in her own gates and up to her own hall door, and had entered the house and been seen in silhouette against her bedroom blind

by the crowd of kind and happy people, before anyone noticed whether or not she had been cured. They consulted each other; and none of them—not even the postmistress, not even the schoolmaster, not even the stationmaster and not even the harbourmaster (this was a purely honorary appointment in the inland valley)—had noticed whether or not the scars were healed and concealed. Somehow they thought that they were not, and they lulled themselves with this decision so that they were enabled to rest all through that summer night and rise refreshed the next morning. She was not on the roof that morning, but she rode courageously out over the ditch where she had fallen, and they were all so impressed by her spirit and bravery that, of course, they forgot to look at her face that day too. On the third day she sent a messenger down to the chandler for some candles for her dinner table, and the messenger returned to say there were no candles to be had in the village. That is absurd, she thought; but she could not remedy matters by saying so, and she merely sent the messenger to the church to borrow a few unblest candles with the promise of returning a dozen for every one she borrowed. The clergy were disappointed to lose the opportunity of closing such a friendly, uncommercial, and profitable deal, but the fact was they had no candles. That really was absurd. She put on a very becoming hat and went down to the village. The first person she met was the postmistress, but the draper's wife came over with her daughter and the daughter's fiancé the chemist, before they had spoken two words. So there was quite a crowd there when she asked about the shortage of candles. They all agreed with her that it was a ridiculous state of affairs, but they could not suggest any reason for it. Suddenly the postmistress clapped her hands together, but they did not ask her what she had remembered, because they knew she would tell them. Before they had time to go away she was reminding them that there were no candles because there had been so many burned in the chapel for the last month. That explained the shortage of candles, but when the beautiful woman asked what they were burning all those candles for anyway, there was not one who could remember. They called over a farmer's boy, who was sneaking by at the moment behind a wagon of hay in order that they should not notice the big bunch of bluebells in his hat, and they asked

him if he could remember why they had lit so many candles before the Virgin last month. And he said quite simply that they had lit them for the safety of the operation. The woman from the big house was grieved to hear that someone had been operated on in the village, but they assured her that no one in the village had been operated on at all. Then she suddenly remembered her own operation, and asked if it could possibly be that out of their kindness they had . . . But she didn't get time to finish, for, of course, they all remembered with a rush and began to tell her together. But they stopped as suddenly as they began, and stared into her face. She was cured. She was completely cured, and there was not the least trace of her scars. In fact her sufferings had made her an impossible bit more lovely. She was indeed the most beautiful woman they had ever looked upon. And they hurried away with brief excuses to tell their husbands and children, for it will be remembered that she had not been up on the roof this time, and they had not all seen her. And as they hurried along the streets they began to wonder if her manner was exactly the same . . . if her clothes were in as perfect a taste as they had been when she was going away. For the force of the unendurable quality of perfect beauty was working in their minds already. The farmer's boy got suddenly impatient with his sentimental bouquet and was about to throw it in the hedge when he pondered on all that had happened. As they went their various ways they all pondered on what had happened; and next minute they were coming back with their husbands and children to ask the beautiful woman to be their Harvest Queen in the autumn of the year. For just as the unendurable pain of her perfect beauty was entering the heart of these people there entered also the steel and iron of a faint suspicion, and it grew with every step they took towards her where she stood at the stone trough in the market square while her bay mare with the cream-coloured mane drank the sun-warm water. For these people who were stupid did not believe in beauty, and so they did not believe either that the operation was really successful. They believed that after a time the scars would show out through the new skin again. They believed this so firmly that they loved her more than ever before. And the girls with moles on their faces, and the men who had married women with double chins, were

one in secretly pitying her as she stood there lovely as the water in which she was reflected. The gods were good to these stupid people, for some reason of their own, and permitted many of them before they died to have their vision without in any way spoiling the beauty of the beautiful woman.

For after many, many years had passed, and she had married and borne children and held her grandchildren in her arms, Time at last cracked the porcelain skin into the faint red lines of broken veins. And the gappy gums of men who were old when she was young who was now old muttered that they had lived to see the prophecies of their fathers come true, and that the brambly brier had shown out through the new skin after all.

But if they were stupid they had gained some grain of wisdom, and they said, before they put their arms into the outheld shrouds, that they didn't know why she had bothered to go away and have new skin grafted over the brambly briery patches on her cheeks; for, indeed, they said, she was more beautiful with than without them.



Miss Holland



The cat decided Miss Holland.

The minute she saw him she decided to stay after all. The house looked comfortable and the landlady was a good-natured looking woman. Miss Holland was not used to interviewing landladies, and she did not know what questions to ask in order to ascertain whether or not the particular guest-house would suit her requirements. Mrs. Lewis had told her the price of the room, the size of the room, the number of meals that were served, and the fact that the bed had a hair mattress. These facts did not interest Miss Holland, who had never before heard what a mattress was stuffed with, and who really did not mind the price if it was at all reasonable. She said this to herself over and over again; but she did not like to say it out loud.

There were a great number of things she did not say out loud; first, because she was tongue-tied from a kind of stiff, dried-up shyness, and, second, because she really did not form them into words even in her own mind. They were just vague wishing and wondering, and had no coherence at all. She would have liked to have something happen that would give her an immediate reaction of feeling, so that she need not say I will stay because there are hair mattresses, but just I will stay because I feel at home. There is something attractive. I don't know what it is. I don't care what it is.

That was the vague indefinite feeling that had made her so attached to her old home. Often in the evening, she had come up the avenue and opened the white hall door and stepped into the cool green hall and drawn a long breath and felt that she belonged where she stood. She always walked quickly

along the hall, and carefully avoided looking at the sporting prints on the wall, and avoided looking directly at the terra cotta carpet on the stairs. She did not want to notice these lovely familiar things in particular, in case she might suddenly be tied to a truth which would make her admit I love this house, because I love the pale green colour of the sporting prints, or I love this house because I carved my name on the back of the banisters. She always wanted to avoid knowing why she did things, because it was so much nicer not to know. It was more mysterious and more lasting. It made for permanence. If I had married, Miss Holland told herself, I would never try to find out what I liked best about my husband. This would preserve our love. It would last for ever, a wonderful intangible mystery, binding us together for all time. If he had a dignified manner I would never say I like his dignity; and then I could bear to see him eat a boiled egg in the shell and see the yolk roll down the shell and perhaps I could even bear to see a little trickle of yolk roll down his chin by accident. It would make him undignified for the moment, but I would not have married him for his dignity. I would have married him for a wonderful, wonderful reason that even I myself could not put into words; and then if his hair got thin and he got irritable in the evening, and if he told the same joke twice, it would not matter at all, and we would love each other all the time.

"Perhaps you'd like time to think it over, Miss Holland," said Mrs. Lewis, who thought that Miss Holland had been thinking over the price ever since she stopped speaking. She had had the withdrawn look women have when they are trying to balance a budget mentally, without a pencil on a bit of an old envelope or the back of a bill.

"I think that I will talk it over with a friend," said Miss Holland with a grateful smile. It was very difficult. If she could only have had a vague feeling about the house, she would have decided there and then to stay. It was such a pretty house, in such a pleasant locality; Chester Gardens. The house was light and airy and it was painted yellow outside. They were outside now at the door, and Miss Holland was saying good-bye again, when the cat came running across a flower bed, pushing his way through the heavy pink antirrhinums and rushing up

the steps to rub himself ingratiatingly against Agnes Holland's neat patent shoes.

All at once, Miss Holland got a feeling of comfort and familiarity and reality. There was something real and alive about 12, Chester Gardens. Suddenly her interview with Mrs. Lewis ceased to be an impersonal event. There was a personal element in the whole thing. She was standing on the white-washed steps, and the walls were yellow like the walls of little cottages in Touraine. The antirrhinums were heavy and pink and warm with the sun. The whole day was heavy and warm and pink. It was June, and June was a pale pink month. . . . That is silly, of course, said Miss Holland. A month couldn't be pink unless it's the roses I'm thinking about. It must be the roses, she decided; and she turned back to Mrs. Lewis, who was wishing she'd go if she was going, but who put on an expression of wishing she'd stay if she was staying. When Miss Holland looked at Mrs. Lewis again, the landlady's face seemed strangely familiar. She was someone Miss Holland knew, and if she met her next week in the street, she would not be just another face, but she would be a person; someone with whom Miss Holland was acquainted. And after all, it was very nice to go to live in a house where you already knew the landlady. She felt warmed and cheered and inexplicably pleased and content, and she stroked the cat and looked up at the sky and said she wouldn't bother to consult a friend; she would make up her mind right now and stay, and when could she send her baggage? . . . She could send her baggage any time. The room was vacant. She could come in that evening if she wished.

Miss Holland came that evening. She came in a taxi and the taxi-man carried in her three large trunks one by one. He treated them very carefully, because they were plastered with labels from foreign parts, he noticed to himself, and these people who had been in foreign parts always knew how to tip well. But Miss Holland did not know anything about tipping. In her father's lifetime she had been to the spas of Europe, but he had always paid the bills and given the tips. She had always stood aside and averted her head a little, and when the financial negotiations were over, she had smiled at the waiters or the taxi-men or the porters, and had said "Thank you" if

they understood English. So that now she was very embarrassed, and she asked the fare in a ridiculously conversational tone of voice, and handed the man the next nearest even sum to the uneven sum of the fare. What would she have done, she wondered, if the fare had worked out even? She really did not know. Give him sixpence, she supposed. Give him sixpence, of course, she thought, as she walked up the nice white stairs with Mrs. Lewis and listened to the soft blur of her voice without hearing what she was saying. When they came to the head of the stairs, they went into a large room, and Mrs. Lewis said the trunks would be sent up and she hoped that the room would be comfortable and that supper was at seven, and that it would be cold meat to-night, but hot meat every other night. And she went towards the door and switched the light once or twice to show the general efficiency of the house, and went out closing the door softly and deftly; a difficult art.

Agnes Holland looked around the room. It was large and bright. The wallpaper was an inoffensive cream colour, and the furniture was polished till it gleamed, and the window square was repeated in its own blue reflection on every door of every cupboard, wardrobe, and cabinet. The bed had an iron head-rail, and the counterpane had been laundered until the bit fat tassels that had once dangled free were flattened into a matted fringe of utter desolation. The room was not ugly, but the mantelpiece was hideous. It was iron painted white, and it had acquired a coating of dust before the paint had dried, which no amount of subsequent washing would erase. Miss Holland saw the ugliness of the mantelpiece almost immediately. It shouted out at her as an ugly word shouted in the street by a maniac startles the inattentive passer-by. Oh, it is ugly! she cried, and then she looked away. . . . I must not look at it. I must not admit that it is ugly. I must look at the lovely wide window. . . . And she ran over to it. The garden was very beautifully kept, for a city garden. There was no economic effort, in the way of cabbage and potatoes, such as is made by so many suburban householders. It was frankly a pleasure garden, and it gave Miss Holland great pleasure to look out. To-morrow, when I have put my china plates on the mantelpiece and I have put flowers in a vase on a side table,

and have put a soft shade upon the lamp, I will think the mantelpiece is not ugly at all. I shall get used to it, and by getting used to it, I shall come to tolerate it; and after that I shall come to associate it with happy moments—reading beside the fire, dressing or brushing my hair. . . . She went over to it. The pattern was about to leap at her with a yell of ugliness, when she put her finger on a little raised rosebud that was part of the large design. . . . I shall think of this little bud, she said; I shall think that it is a real little pink bud that has been painted over and imprisoned for ever. . . . She laughed at her own silliness and decided that it was easy to be clever about hideous things. It was really easy to disguise their ugliness. You got to know them and they had an association for you, and then they were no longer ugly. Isn't that right, little rosebud? She started taking the pins out of her hair to take it down and comb it out before supper.

Supper was an ordeal that she dreaded. She was very nervous of walking into the public dining-room of a boarding house and facing a crowd of strangers. She went downstairs feeling the same way that she felt as a child on her first day at school. She wanted them to like her, she did not want them to be leagued with the inevitable bond that unites people who already know each other against a stranger. She looked into the hall mirror and wondered how she would look to people who did not know her. She put her hand on the door, and turned it quickly and went into the dining-room.

There were five people at table, and they had the self-conscious look of people who share a joke at the expense of a newcomer. But Miss Holland did not mind. She understood completely. She longed to tell them so.

She would like to say simply: I know you were just speculating about me, but I don't mind. I quite understand. It's like school, isn't it? On the first day. For me, I mean. . . . But of course she could not say it, she knew that. And, anyway, she was not so sure it was like school, now that she looked around her. In school she had the same kind of tailored dress as everybody else, the same kind of hand-made shoes and gloves. She had her hair cut the same way and she spoke exactly the same. She was the same as the strange children who stared at her in school, on her first day; and even then, young

as she was, she knew that this fact would make her one of them in a few hours.

But there was very little bond between herself and the people at this table. They didn't dress like her, they didn't speak like her, they didn't even hold their cups like her, she thought with a start. And she began to fold another slice of bread in two, but it was too thick and broke, and she had to take up her knife and carve into it—as if it were roast beef, she thought, laughing to herself. . . . There is a terrible difference. They are keeping right on talking to each other, they are not even trying to be polite to me, to include me, to make me one of them. . . . And a swell of feeling surged up into her throat and she could not finish her slice of bread and she looked at each of these people, two good-looking young men and three indifferent young women. The men were medical students, and they had full healthy bodies; Miss Holland could not define what the difference was between them and the men she had met at home, her cousins and their friends. They wear very good clothes, she noticed, and they speak about the same, but there is something. She could not say what. It's hard to tell with men, anyway. With women though. . . . She tried not to stare at the three young women. Much younger than me, of course. . . . They weren't looking, anyway. She could stare as much as she liked. . . . The red jumper is machine-made. The green dress is dressmaker-made, and the quiet one with the glasses keeps her handkerchief tucked up her sleeve. But these little things cannot matter. They couldn't possibly matter. I shall like them even though their taste is different. After all, perhaps it is I who am wrong. There is no way of deciding definitely, after all. I have much less money and my clothes are older. Freshness and newness, that's what they represent, the red jumpers and the fresh white collars. And that's something to be praised. I'd like to praise them. To-morrow perhaps, or the next day, I'll know them. When I come into the dining-room I'll say to the tall one with the glasses: "Your cold is better to-day, I hope?" I'll know them and they'll know me, and it won't be strange and lonely. I shall belong here for a time, and when I look back, years from now, in my mind I shall always have to come into this room to find a certain part of me. Like going back in mind to the

corner of the quadrangle to find the part of me that grew courageous the day I killed the robin who was dying. She looked up suddenly and hoped no one saw her shudder. They were staring at her in between their talk about the Rugby trials.

"Will you excuse me, please?"

Her voice sounded silly and shy. She went out with difficulty. The door-knob fell off when she put her hand on it. No one helped her to pick it up, but they all laughed.

"That will happen every day, you may as well get used to it," said the blond student. And Miss Holland smiled in gratitude. Contact was made. To-morrow she would not be a stranger. She would be accepted. They would say, "Will you ever forget last night when the handle fell off the door?" And a warm rush of feeling surged up in her again, and she felt that her life with her father was long ago, and that it had been decayed and faded and outmoded before it died. This new life was warm and the people were real and human, and it didn't matter if they cut their bread and reached for the salt instead of waiting for it to be passed. These things were the superficial things of life. These young women who could discuss the cases of the young medicals were more alive than she had ever been. They were nearer to the pulse of life than she had ever been. They were fascinating.

She went into her room, still thinking of the young women she had left. They were invested with wonderful qualities in her mind. Primary colours, forceful and alarming but infinitely attractive, and beside her thoughts of them her memories of her old home and her old friends faded into pastel insignificance. She sat on her bed and looked round the room. They don't notice the ugliness of their rooms. They ignore small points of difference between tailor-made and ready-made clothes. They transcend these things. They speak of life with courage and vigour. She remembered fragments of the conversation. She was even more impressed by them in retrospect than she was at supper. There had been a headlong continuous discussion of different topics that ran into each other so smoothly that there were no divisions between topic and topic, no division between the injustice of the Rugby trials, the necessity of the early closing hour, the small cost of feeding large numbers of people, the cruelty of allowing medical students on maternity

cases, the falling British birth-rate, and the endless scraps of subjects that she hadn't been able to follow at all.

A sharp arrow of apprehension ran through her. Supposing I cannot follow them to-morrow, or the next day, or ever. Supposing I am not able to discuss these things with them. They will think me a fool, a member of the older generation they condemn. I shall be, to them, what they have made my memories seem to me: old-fashioned. Oh, if they think I'm old-fashioned! And she ran to the glass to get assurance, although she did not mean her appearance but her personality.

That was the beginning of a gradual paralysis of personality that fell on Agnes Holland. For two weeks, she went three times a day to the dining-room of the boarding house. She became acquainted with all the other "guests." She said "boarders" when she spoke to them, by a natural adaptability that made her realize the limitations of her gentility. She admired Miss Margaret Moran's collar and gave Miss Betty Stone a remedy for her cold. Still she did not feel accepted. She did not feel one of these people. She had no confidence in herself. All day she wrote letters and walked in the park and occasionally she visited friends, but her main interest was concentrated on a desperate effort to reach out and clutch the strings of reality that she felt to be within her reach for the first time in her life. And yet she could not catch them. . . . If only I could say something that would attract their attention, draw their interest towards me . . . She felt aggrieved that her education on the Continent and her travels with her father at home and abroad had left her no training or experience for discussion with real people. I can't talk to them. I know nothing about the things that interest them. I can only talk about books and about pictures and about music. I cannot talk about the real problems of life. I am forty-four and I don't know the attitude of the Church on divorce. I don't know what constitutes a living wage. What is the right tip to give a porter. I don't know anything. . . . She watched and listened at meals and agreed with all that she understood by little vigorous nods of her head. When politics were the subject of discussion at lunch, she would spend the afternoon reading the papers and even go to the British Museum and look up politics in the *Encyclopædia Britannica*. Then she felt

sure that she would be able to make some very intelligent remarks that night at supper. All through supper she would sit in a tight straight rigidity of nervousness, indifferent to the food, waiting for an opportunity to enter the conversation in a striking way.

Those opportunities never came. They would talk about something entirely different, the suicide of a Government official who had embezzled funds or the price of bicycles for hire in Jersey. On occasions like this she felt out of everything, alone, useless. She clung tightly to her little piece of potential conversation in case a chance might come to use it at the very last minute. Later she said it to herself, in the dark, in bed, with great success, and everyone was impressed and said that a mature mind always saw a quick solution of such problems. Experience imposed a correct perspective, they said, and asked her if she would come and meet some of their friends sometime; and she had smiled and they had smiled and there was a soft thud of silence in her mind and she was asleep with a smile still on her face.

Things went on like that. Miss Holland became more and more discouraged. She seemed to be getting further away from making a contact with these young people. It was an obsession, and the more she sought for suitable topics of conversation, the more unsuitable were the topics that flooded into her mind. Silly whimsical ideas, fragile fantasies and ludicrous comparisons came tumbling into her mind as she walked in the park or sat by her window.

In particular the big black cat belonging to the house came into her thoughts, till she felt she simply must tell someone about him. He was wonderful. It was he who had first decided her to come to Chester Gardens. But you could not tell that to anyone, it sounded so silly. All morning when the others were gone out to work, she sat at her window writing letters and sticking stamps in her stamp album and watching the cat playing in the garden. He was a big fellow, but he still played like a kitten, jumping over the flowers or running along the high wall that was just under her window. He fascinated her. She watched him, so striking in the purity of his blackness, big but deft as he ran through the flowers. Sometimes when she called out of the window he would stare up at her; his

eyes would light up. His eyes changed colours like the traffic lights. She smiled at her comparison, smiled and laughed outright; and he leaped, ran along until he came directly under the window. There he sat in the sunlight, soft and strong. He did not look black now, but a lovely prune colour, and there was a shining line of silver sunlight etching his silhouette against the blue sky. This was the light on his shining fur. When he moved the silver line glinted and glistened and his whiskers were strands of stiff silver wire. He was so attractive, so fascinating, and Miss Holland was so pleased to find descriptive words for his charming qualities, that she made a point of memorizing her mental picture of him in definite words.

She liked her choice of words and she wondered what her fellow guests would think of them. Surely, surely, surely they would think them charming, evocative, and poetic. Even though they did not read poetry, they would think her ideas about the big black tomcat very pretty and original. She resolved to try them, and she ran back over her sentences, chopping them up, changing them a little and altering their sequence. Still she could never quite imagine herself saying them out loud in public. She knew that if she got into the middle of the idea she would be all right, but she felt that they would never listen beyond the initial sentence unless it was very striking. They all had a knack of beginning their own conversations with such startling phrases! To-day Mr. Harvey had said: "Blood makes you girls sick, only for that I'd tell you a good yarn." Of course, the girls were excited and interested immediately, and they listened to a long story that Miss Holland thought very dull indeed. The girls roared laughing and she had to allow their laughter to fall into her mind and make mechanical echoes before she could laugh herself. But she did laugh then. She laughed and laughed and felt that she was nearer to them at that moment than she had ever been before. If I could strike while the iron is hot, she thought. If I, to-night at dinner, could begin suddenly with a startling phrase, I would tell them all about the cat.

She looked down at him. He was washing himself. The silver line was gone. He had imperceptibly shifted his position and the sunlight no longer glinted on his fur, but he was still lovely. His head was curved back in the same smooth arc of

soft black flesh that delights the eye when a foal turns his head round to look backwards without moving the rest of his body—Oh you are lovely, Pussy, lovely, lovely! How shall I begin to tell them about you? I shall say: "I was looking at the cat to-day." No, that was not a good beginning. "Speaking about cats—" That would be a safe opening, but unfortunately they never did speak about cats. "Pussy, do something startling, so that I can tell my friends about you," she whispered down to the cat, and suddenly, as if he had heard her, he jumped down from the wall and stretched himself, walked a few paces down the garden path and then, with a superb suggestion of unpremeditated action, to the astonishment of Miss Holland, he opened his mouth and snapped off the head of a heavy red carnation. He jumped on to the wall again and ran along it with the red carnation in his mouth. Like a Spanish dancer.

Miss Holland clapped her hands. "Like a Spanish dancer"—That would be a lovely beginning for her story. She would lean casually on the table after supper and say: "The cat was like a Spanish dancer to-day." Everyone would ask her why, and she would have their attention. Then she could tell them all about the shimmering silver line of sunlight on his fur, all about his agate eyes, and perhaps she could tell them all about her little private trick of finding a name for the nice things which she wanted to remember for ever, and her efforts to avoid finding a name for the ugly things she wished to forget. She would tell them all these little things and they would see that she was not stupid and dried-up, and they would see that she was worth getting to know and that her company was worth cultivating. Afterwards, perhaps, they would come into her room and they would talk to her about their lives and she would learn facts about the world, about poverty and struggle, about courage in the face of adversity, and other things that she had never known. Perhaps she would be able to help them to get more enjoyment out of the small details of life that seemed to make such little impression on them. She would help them to see the funniness of the landlady's efforts to make them eat parsnips whether they liked it or not. She'd make them read. She'd even make them read poetry. And some day they would say to her: "Only for you . . ."

But it was time to go to supper. She ran to her wardrobe and

pulled out her best dress. Her cheeks were redder than usual. Her hair would not lie flat. She felt excited but not flustered. She felt more coherent, more articulate than she had felt for years. This is how a great actress feels on a first night before the curtain goes up. But this is more important than a play on a stage. This is reality. She ran downstairs.

They were all seated before her. They looked warm and kind and homely. The girls had the same clothes on to-day that they had every day. The brown tweed suit on Mr. Harvey was warm-looking, homely, and he said, "Fried fish. What do you bet?" before he pulled the cover-dish off the big blue dish on the sideboard. It was so natural. It was the way nine-tenths of the people of the world lived, not dreaming at night, joking with each other, discussing big political problems. Her life at home before her father died seemed sad and grey. She used to wear a trailing chiffon dress, quite old, but definitely formal still, despite its age. Her father liked her to dress. They ate together in the dining-room and the food was also good. The maid laid the dishes in front of one and withdrew then; and Miss Holland did not eat the things she did not like. Here she had to eat everything. Here she had to behave like everyone else. Here you had to reach for your bread and refer to the butter as margarine as a joke, and call the roly-poly "Spotted Dog," and laugh when Mr. Harvey said "More swill for you, Miss Holland," as he ladled out the soup.

She was part of the wheel of the world that was rolling around, now in the mud, now up in the blue air. She was glad. She was happier than ever before. I am happier than ever before, she said, putting it into a coherent sentence in her mind—I am happier than ever before, and now I will tell my story. Miss Stone is finishing her account of the Ladies' Hockey Match.

"The crowd was simply terrible coming out the gate, but I got here all right."

"Trust you to make a way for yourself, Cissie!"

"You're not so bad at it yourself, Ed."

They all laughed heartily at this, and again Miss Holland felt a little disconcerted, but she watched for an opening, a little black hole of silence in the conversation into which she would shoot the silver arrow of her contribution to this gay family meal.

The black-and-white-checked pattern of the talk grew less regular, the black squares of silence were getting larger between the white lines of repartee. Suddenly there was a large square of black. Miss Holland almost rose from her seat in her excitement.

"A funny thing happened to-day."

"Well, I'm a hell of a fool!"

Miss Holland looked around startled at the duet that cut the silence. Mr. Moriarty's pale eyes looked into hers with disconcerted surprise. They had both spoken together. Their words had clashed in the air. They both drew back. The table waited. There was a moment of suspense. Which of them would begin again? The heads turned expectantly towards Miss Holland, who felt confused. Mr. Moriarty said, "Excuse me, you were going to say something." She felt flustered.

"Oh, nothing at all. It can wait."

And Mr. Moriarty, who was used to walking out of doors in front of women, walked out this conversational door that Miss Holland held open for him.

"Well, I was going to tell you all something you'll be damn glad to hear. I don't know how I forgot to tell you this morning. Wait till you hear it, I'll be given a leather medal. Last night that damn tomcat was crying in the yard and I got out my old shot-gun I have had since I was a kid and I threw up the window and aimed at him. I could just barely see him, but I had a good aim and he got a pellet in the backside and he went off over the wall yelping and yowling, and that was the end of the cat's concert."

There was a roar of laughter and it rose up in waves of red around Miss Holland. She sat still and felt the ugly red colour that the sound suggested flood over her. And then gradually the laughing ceased and the waves sank back in her brain, fading out to orange, yellow, and finally an ugly putty brown. Against this background she saw five faces, five distorted faces. She felt that they were the faces of people who did not exist, people in a nightmare, from whom she must get away immediately and for ever and ever. She half rose to go. Wait a minute. There was something she must do. She looked from one face to another. She felt she had a duty to fulfil towards

herself. For a moment it was not clear, then her ideas became clarified.

Miss Holland spoke to herself silently in her own mind as clearly and coherently as if she were speaking out loud to another person: I must define their ugliness, their commonness, their bad taste. I must find a name for the things about them which irritate me and disgust me. I can no longer delude myself. Only by recognizing the things which I object to in these people, and giving them a name, can I ever protect myself from coming into contact with them again.

Mr. Harvey has a dark grey stain of grease on the leg of his trousers.

Mr. Moriarty has false teeth, and when he takes them out at night he sometimes forgets them and leaves them in a jam jar in the bathroom. They grin at you.

Betty Stone has a stain of perspiration, a crescent of frog's-belly green, on her bottle-green dress.

Margaret Moran has a bit of red bleeding flesh, like an inflamed pimple, between her two front teeth.

The little girl with glasses has a wart on the palm of her hand, and when you shake hands with her, you do not feel that you are shaking hands with a woman, you feel you are shaking hands with a wart. You are conscious of nothing else for the moment of contact.

For a long time I tried not to notice these things. I tried to submerge them in my good opinions of these people, but now they are laid bare. Now they shall live for ever in my mind. By these things I will know these people and, by like things, I will know like people. Henceforth I will go consciously in the way that I have hitherto gone because my people before me went that way. She went out of the dining-room. The door-knob clattered to the floor. No one noticed her going. No one picked up the knob.



The Dead Soldier



When he was going away his mother and Solly went to Dublin to see him off. When they got off the train the sun was still to be seen in the alleyways and spaces between the buildings, but by the time they had made their way to the docks it was dark. They stood under a lamp-post so they would be sure to pick him out from the other men as he marched past. When they heard the band in the distance they stood very close together, and when the children came running along in the dark, ahead of the soldiers, the old woman began to tremble.

The soldiers came along four abreast. They came along the quay in dark ranks, advancing steadily, rank after rank, inevitably, like the ranked waves of the sea. And under the lamp-post, where the women stood, the black ranks foamed into faces, for a moment, and then went onward again, rank after rank, into the darkness where the river sirens occasionally wailed.

They knew instinctively when the rank that Matty was in came near, and when his face shone in the light they took the full advantage of their eyes in staring at him. They smiled and put their hands to their lips. But they couldn't be sure if he saw them.

When they were in the train going home again, the old woman was upset.

"If we ran as far as the next lamp-post we would have seen him again!"

"Now, Mother!" said Solly. "You know yourself that Matty would not have wanted us to do that. He'd only be saying afterwards that we made a laughing stock of ourselves

before the other men, running along the street trying to keep up with the soldiers."

"That's like what a daughter would say," said the old woman. "A son would never say the like of that. A son would never see anything to laugh at in his own mother, no matter what she did."

"All the same," said Solly, "I'm glad we stayed where we were. We might have lost the way if we went any farther from the station, and we might have missed the train." She looked out the carriage window at the strange pattern of the lighted city that was fading against the black sky, and she wondered what got into men that they wanted to go off to fight in a foreign country that meant nothing to them, one way or another. Matt was a real Irishman, if ever there was one, and yet he was one of the first to give his name and go off to France, although the old woman cried and threw herself down on the floor and besought him not to go.

"Women don't understand," was all Matty said, patting the old woman's head.

"Leave the way!" he said to Solly, and he went towards the door.

"Stay where you are, Solly!" said the old woman.

"I can't stop him, Mother, if he's set on going," said Solly, and she had to stand aside and let him pass.

That was only four days ago, and now he was gone; and in a few hours they would be back in the empty house, making up the fire that had never been let die out before, since the old woman came into the house as a young bride in a blue dress, Solly knew all about the blue dress. It had cerise bows down the front. The old woman was always talking about it. "I suppose she'll never talk about it again," thought Solly. "She'll talk about nothing but Matty now, till the day he comes home again."

The talk about Matty began the minute they got into the house. As they made up the fire the old woman told Solly stories about the time Matty was a child, and even when Solly went out to the well she could hear the old woman talking to herself; laughing over some things and sobbing over other things. When she thought of the times she had been hurt and worried when Matty was growing up, she laughed, because

those times were gone; but when she thought of the gay times, when he used to bring her home a bunch of cornflowers and poppies from the field, she sobbed, and wiped her eyes with her skirt, because those times were gone as well.

Both the chaff and the grain had gone on the wind, and the barren days had begun. In the house where seven men had sat down, to be served by herself and Solly, there was no one now to sit down but the servers. Matty was the last of the men to leave home, and the force that drove him out to his adventure was beyond the comprehension of women.

Week after week there was no other talk but talk about Matty. The priest called, and he had to stay for an hour and a half listening to an account of the time that Matty played hurley for the county.

When he was going he called Solly out into the yard.

"Let her talk about him all she wants. Don't stop her," he said. "It will be an ease to her mind."

When they got the news that Matty was killed Solly didn't bother to go over to the priest's house, because she knew that he would say the same thing. What else was there to say? And so she went around the house listening to the old woman and encouraging her to talk.

Whenever there was a death in the parish Solly always took the opportunity to console her mother.

"Murty Glynn is dead, Mother. He had a hard death. He was dying for three days and three nights. They said it was agony to look at him. Isn't any death better than that? Isn't a blow of a bullet a grand death compared with that?"

"I don't know," said the old woman. "It's a great thing to die in your bed."

"It's a great thing to die in peace! You wouldn't want to think Matty was lying inside there in the room, writhing in agony, would you? Isn't it better to think of him laughing one minute and lying at peace the next minute?"

"I suppose you're right," said the old woman. "But it's a nice thing to be able to lay a body out, and see that he gets the best in candles and flowers. It's nice to get a last look at him before he's put down into the grave."

"I think it's not right to talk like that, Mother. It's flying in the face of God's goodness. It's nice to remember him as

we saw him last, marching along to the sound of the band, and a smile on his face. I'm glad I don't have to remember him as a corpse. All corpses are alike in my opinion."

"You don't know what you're talking about," said the old woman. "Your father was the most handsome corpse that was ever stretched. People that never knew him when he was alive came from miles just to see him laid out, he looked so handsome. I can see him to this day, when I close my eyes, looking as fine and fierce as a living man, and you'd think to look at his hands that he'd raise up one of them, any minute, and brush away the flies that were flying around the flowers!"

"All the same, I'm glad I don't remember him," said Solly, "and I'm glad I didn't see Matty dead. I'm glad I remember him alive." She took up a picture from the mantelpiece. It was a picture of two swans, standing in a clump of bulrushes. There was no glass in the picture, and it was framed with engraved steel.

"I was thinking we could take out this picture," she said, "and put in one of Matty."

She took down a prayer book from a shelf under the mantelpiece, took out a photograph, and began to put it into the frame instead of the picture of the two swans.

"Be careful you don't tear it when you're putting it in," said the mother, leaning anxiously over Solly's shoulder and watching her fingers. When she was satisfied that Solly was doing it carefully she picked up the picture of the swans in the bulrushes and put it into the prayer book, and put the prayer book back on the smoky shelf.

"Give me that frame," she said. "I'll shine it up a bit." She wiped it in her skirt, rubbing it back and forth, and then looking at it, and wiping it back and forth again, until, apparently, she saw some improvement in it and put it back on the mantelpiece, satisfied. She stared into the eyes of the photograph.

"I often saw him looking just like that," she said.

Solly took the picture and she looked at it. "Isn't it funny," she said, "the different looks a person can have on his face, from one time to another, and yet when you think of him you think of him with the one look on his face? I always think of him the way he looked when he was passing by the lamp-post the night he went away."

"If you were his mother you'd remember every single look he ever had on his face from the day he was born to the last day you looked at him. Do you mean to say you don't remember the way he looked when he came running in with the blood pouring down his face the day he fell on the broken pie dish in the yard and cut his head open?"

"No," said Solly, "I don't remember that day."

"Don't you?" said the old woman in surprise. "Well, surely you remember the day he came racing up the yard with the geese after him, and his face red as the jersey on his back?"

"No," said Solly, "but I remember the way he looked in his uniform the first day he put it on, when he was showing us the map and marking out where France was. He had his cap pushed back on his head, and the track of it was across his forehead in a big red weal."

"It's my opinion that that cap was too small for him," said the mother; "it was too tight across the forehead. It should have been a half-size larger."

"He told you himself, Mother, that they don't look into half-sizes in the Army!"

She smiled into the eyes of the photograph. Matty would be pleased if he was listening to her now, consoling their mother.

But the talk hadn't penetrated far into the old woman's sorrow.

"No matter how many memories you have," she said, "it doesn't make up for not seeing him laid out in his own house. I don't like to think of them burying him in a hurry, along with a lot of other poor young fellows. I think to myself that, for all we know, it may have been night-time, and raining at that, and the place too dark and wet for them to kneel down and say a prayer for him!"

"Now, Mother, stop crying. You may be sure they knelt down and said a prayer for him, no matter how wet or how dark it was, when they didn't know which of themselves would be the next to be shot down."

"I suppose you're right," said the old woman, "and anyway I thought by the letter the officer wrote that he wasn't the kind of man to throw down a spade out of his hands after burying a boy, and not wait to kneel down and say a prayer."

"You may be sure he said many a prayer," said Solly, "but

of course, I don't suppose it was the officer himself who buried Matty!"

"He said in the letter that he did! 'We buried him under a little ash tree,' he said. 'I know his mother will be glad to hear that.' I was very glad. I say a prayer for that officer every night after I've said the prayers for Matty and for his father, and for my own poor mother and father; God be good to them. I always say a special prayer for that officer."

"I suppose he was there at the time," said Solly, "but it's likely he got someone else to do the digging for him!"

"I wouldn't give in to that," said the mother. "Matty was a nice lad. Everyone took a liking to him. I never knew anyone yet that didn't take a liking to him, specially when he smiled. He had a lovely smile."

Solly took up the frame and looked at her brother's face again.

"I couldn't get him to smile when I was taking this picture of him. He kept telling me to hurry up all the time. 'Take the picture, can't you, if you're going to take it?' he said. 'I'm not going to stand here all day with the sun in my eyes!'"

"I hope he wasn't lying in the sun when he was wounded," the mother said suddenly. "I heard Mary Mack and Maggie Cullen talking in the shop yesterday about a young lad who was wounded, Maggie's son wrote home to say that the young lad, whoever he was, was lying in the blazing sun for six hours before they found him, and they only got time to pull him over under a bit of a tree or a bush, before the poor fellow died. 'I'm glad I'm not going to die looking up at the bloody sun' was the last thing he said. They stopped talking when they saw I was listening. I suppose they thought I'd feel bad on account of my boy being killed in the war too. But I'd only love to hear them talking. You like to hear about other people's troubles when you have trouble of your own."

"All the same, I wouldn't listen to those old gossipers," said Solly, "they love to talk about people that are dead or dying, just to make themselves important."

"You don't understand. You don't understand," said the old mother. "I was thinking of what they said when I was walking home along the road, and I was wondering what was the last thing our Matty said. The officer didn't think to tell us!"

"I'm sure Matty would be praying," said Solly, "but maybe if the officer wasn't a Catholic himself he wouldn't think to put a thing like that in a letter."

"That's right. I'm sure he was praying. He was a good boy. Still, it's a great consolation for a mother, if she has to lose a son, to see him slipping out of this world with a good grip on the crucifix and his lips moving trying to repeat the prayers of the priest."

"Don't talk like that now, Mother," said Solly. "I've often heard tell that a soldier gets a special grace when he's dying. Many a one, they say, is saved at the last minute, just by thinking of the Judgment."

"That's right. God is good," said the old woman. "I hope I won't have so long to wait now till I'm called myself to meet my dear ones."

"And what about me?" said Solly. "Have you no consideration for me, Mother, that you sit there talking about dying, and not remembering that I'd be all alone then, with no one at all to care whether I get a bit to eat for myself or not?"

The old woman was staring into the fire and she didn't hear Solly. It was getting late and the fire was dying down. Solly took out a candle from the drawer of the dresser. She paid no attention to the fact that the old woman didn't answer her. She didn't expect an answer. Her own remark was an old one, well worn, and brought into use every time the old woman began to talk about dying.

"I think sometimes when I'm half asleep I see his face in the fire," said the old woman, again, after a few minutes' silence.

"Take heed would you fall into the fire some night, staring into it like that, and you half asleep," said Solly. "Will I take out your pillow, Mother, and put it by the fire, for a spell, to take the chill off it before you go to bed? It's getting late."

The old woman looked up.

"Do you know what night it is?" she said.

"Tuesday night, isn't it?" said Solly, looking at the calendar.

"Yes, it's Tuesday," she said.

"It's the first of November," said her mother.

"So it is," said Solly. "All Souls' Night."

"My own poor mother, God be good to her," said the old

woman, "used to say that the dead come back to their own fireside to-night, and sit down by the hob until the first light comes stealing up through the trees."

Solly went into the other room and came out with the pillow in her arms. "Here's the pillow. Hold it to the fire for a bit, Mother, and then we'll go to bed. Don't be talking about ghosts. Listen to the wind under the door! I wish there was a man in the house to put a bit of cement on the floor, there by the hinge. That's where the wind is coming in."

"My father used to laugh at my mother," the old woman continued, "and tell her that if it was as easy as all that to come back from the grave, there wouldn't be such a dread on people at the thought of going into it."

"That's what I say too," said Solly.

"The old people had strange notions when I was a child."

"Old people are always the same," said Solly. "I wouldn't wonder to hear that you were thinking of sitting up all night yourself to see if Matty would come back!"

She gave an awkward laugh, and she stood back out of the circle of the lamp so she could look at the old woman. She had an idea the old woman might have a notion of staying up and she wanted to laugh her out of it. The old woman threw a big sod of turf on the fire.

"Why are you putting on turf at this hour of the night, when we're going straight to our beds?"

"It's raking down the fire every night that has this house as damp as it is," said the old woman. "It's no harm to have a good blaze on the hearth during the night in damp weather like this. The wall over there, by the dresser, is dripping wet. The lime is washing down off it. There'll be a hole in it after another winter."

"A man would mix up a bit of plaster for that wall while you'd be looking around you," said Solly. "Is the pillow warm?"

"It is," said the old woman. "Light the candle."

Solly stuck a bit of paper in between the red sods of turf on the hearthstone, and when it lit with a pout of flame she held the flame to a candle-butt that she took out of her pocket.

"Are you coming, Mother?" she said, going into the next

room and standing the candle in a cup on the table beside the soft tufty bed with its startling white counterpane.

The old woman hoisted herself out of the chair by leaning on the arms and drawing herself up with a jerk.

"Stop that candle from guttering and spluttering," she said.

Solly squeezed the burnt end of the wick with her finger and thumb, and the candle blazed freshly and clearly along the new piece of wick.

"Do you know what it is?" she said. "The moon is so bright to-night you'd hardly want a candle at all!"

Through the small window, the rim of the hill outside the house could be seen against the bright moonlit sky. The light of the candle, the lamp, and the fire, all burning at their brightest, was not strong enough to keep out the light of the moon. Even an odd star, that shone brighter than the other stars, could be seen as clearly from where they stood as if the cottage were in darkness.

"The moon is in full bloom," said the old woman.

Solly stood looking out and listening. The wind had risen and it sounded in the trees, somewhere away off behind the cottage.

"It's odd for the wind to be so high on a moon-bright night," she said.

The old woman went into the inner room. Solly turned down the lamp in the outer room and kicked in a sod that had fallen on the hearth.

"If you feel cold, Mother, be sure to give a rap on the wall, and I'll come down and put another blanket over you." She went up the steps of the loft. "Give a good loud rap," she repeated when she got to the top step.

"I won't want any more over me than I have every night," said the old woman. "Put another blanket over yourself. Young people nowadays haven't as good blood in their veins as we had in our day."

Solly closed the door of the loft. The old woman left her door open and she went on talking softly to herself. Solly listened for a few minutes and then she began to take off her clothes, and she lay down on the trestle bed with her face to the gable window where she could see the bright sky. But she was asleep before a travelling cloud had crossed the bright face of the moon.

Down below the old woman was still talking to herself.

"I don't know why Solly is so cold," she said. "They were all cold, every one of the children, but Solly and Matty were the worst. Perhaps it's because they came last of the family." She sat on the edge of the tufty bed, and it sank down to one side with a creak.

"Matty could never get socks thick enough to suit him." She stood up again and the bed sprang up with a rusty whinge. She went over to the yellow chest of drawers in the corner and pulled out the top drawer. She took out a thick grey sock and another unfinished sock, that dangled out of four steel needles.

"There's no harm in finishing a thing once it's begun," she said. And she went over to the open door that led into the kitchen and listened to Solly's breathing.

"Who knows?" she said. "Matty might come back. There was a lot of sense in the things my mother said. I don't believe that everyone that dies has the power to come back, but a poor harmless boy like Matty, that died so far away from his home, might be allowed to come back as far as the door and step inside for a minute just to please his old mother." She put the finished sock back in the drawer, and then on second thoughts she took it out again.

"He might like to see I was still knitting for him, even after he was gone. But of course it's only nonsense thinking that he'll come back." She put her hand in, under the bolster, and drew out a pair of worn rosary beads that were brightly polished from continual handling.

"Poor Matty!" she said. "Poor Matty! Your old mother would give her senses for one sight of your darling face!" She went out into the kitchen, talking to herself.

"He won't come, I know that. But it's no harm to stay up awhile. I couldn't sleep, anyway. My father was right when he said that people wouldn't get it so hard to leave this world if there was any chance of getting back to it. He had good sayings. He wore my poor mother out with his continual talk, but she cried herself into a fainting fit the day he died. It is a strange thing the way you appreciate a person when he's gone from you. But it's a strange thing too that I never had any hankering to see my father or mother again, once they were gone, nor any of the other children either, the way I hanker to see Matty."

She left the light unlit, finding her way in the darkening and brightening shadows of the fire, and pausing to feel the edges of the furniture almost as a blind person might have done, with gentleness and timidity and yet with a kind of loving gratitude in the touch of her fingers.

"If I had seen him laid out I might have been satisfied," she said, as she sat down by the fire.

For a long time, then, there was no sound, as her fingers went up and down the knitting needles, except when the tips of the needles came together, accidentally, with a little knocking sound. Then a sod fell with a thud, and the bitter smell of smoke threaded the air. She let it burn where it lay until the bitter fumes made her eyes sore. When she stirred in her chair, to lift it, the chair made a harsh sound as it grated on the rough flagstones. She looked anxiously up at the loft to see if Solly had wakened. But Solly slept on.

The clock on the wall seemed to get louder and louder as she listened, and she could barely make out where it was on the wall, because of the way the room was darkening, and because of the way the clouds were passing over the moon every minute. She could imagine that she saw the clock, but she could not possibly have been looking at it, because she imagined it as it was when she was first married. Then the paint was fresh and bright. It was red, with blue and yellow flowers stencilled up the sides, and a fluffy cuckoo that came out on the platform with his beak open and called out the hours. But of course there was no paint on it now. It was as smoky as a pot, and there'd been no cuckoo in it since the day Matty knocked him off with a catapult, when he was a little lad. She was very angry with him that day. She was going to raise her hand to him, but he pleaded with her like a little girl.

"I wouldn't have touched him if he was alive, Mother!" he said. "But I knew he was only made of cardboard and feathers," and he picked up the cuckoo and plucked out the feathers to show her the cardboard body.

She put out her hand and groped along the mantel edge till she found the framed photograph, and she lifted it carefully and held it low down near the flames to see the features more clearly.

"If you come you'll find your old mother waiting for you,

Matty," she said. "But God is an obstinate man. The dead can never come back. God has his own ideas, but it's very hard on the like of me."

The wind dropped, but it rose again in a gust. Soot loosened in the chimney and fell down on the turf. Under the door there was a thin whistling sound and then the clouds broke and the moon slipped out, like a nut from the kernel. All at once the room was bright, as if a light had flashed in through the window again.

And then there was a step outside the door.

The old woman remained where she was, crouched low over the flames with the steel frame in her hands.

"Good Christ," she said. "Good Christ deliver us!"

She didn't move. The moon was covered again. The steps came nearer. They paused outside the window. They went past the window. They came back. They paused outside the window again.

"Christ and His Blessed Mother," said the old woman. She raised her eyes without raising her head. "I can't be seen from here," she thought. "If I was sitting between the fire and the window it would be another thing; but I can't be seen from here."

The wind dropped. There was no sound.

"Maybe I only thought I heard a step," she said.

Then the steps sounded outside the door.

"The door is bolted. The door is bolted," said the old woman, staring at the door, and as she stared her upper lip raised slowly upwards at the side, till her yellow teeth, and her gapped gums, were seen at each side. Her face looked like a mask with a gap for breathing cut out of the lower part of it.

The hand pressed down the latch.

"Good Christ deliver us! Matty, go back where you belong! Go back where you belong for the love of God and His Holy Mother, and leave us in peace to live out the bit of life that is left to us. Good Christ deliver us! Holy Mother ward off from us all wicked spirits who wander through the night!"

She longed to scream out for Solly, but she couldn't raise her voice beyond a whisper.

The steps went away from the door. They paused again at the window. She could just make out a dark form, indistinctly.

"Good Christ keep the clouds travelling," she implored, and she raised her eyes again as high as she could, without moving her head, till she felt the veins swelling and throbbing at the back of her eye sockets. She saw a great rent coming in the clouds.

"Good Christ! Good Christ!" she said, over and over again, and then the clouds broke and the moon slipped out.

There was no one at the window.

The old woman put her hands over her eyes and ran over to the loft steps, knocking into the edge of the table, and knocking into the bench at the foot of the steps. She didn't feel the pain flash into her dry flesh, in her hurry to touch the warm and living body of Solly.

Solly didn't feel her crawling in across her, but she wasn't surprised in the morning when she found her in the bed.

"I often wondered why you didn't sleep up here," she said. "It's warmer up here than down below. Were you cold? Did you rap on the wall?"

"I didn't rap," said the old woman. "I didn't want blankets. I was lonesome thinking of Matty." She looked at Solly with a sly look, but Solly was drawing on her stockings and didn't appear to notice anything unusual.

"Will I make you a nice cup of tea, Mother, before you put your feet out on the floor?"

"No," said the mother. "I'll get up. What time is it by that clock?"

"It's ten minutes past eight."

"I think I'll go to Mass," said the old woman. "The only way you can help the dead is by praying for them night and day."

Solly looked at her.

"Why are you raising your lips like that, Mother?" she said sharply. "You look as if you saw a ghost!"

"Nobody ever saw a ghost. Stop your nonsense!" said the old woman.

"Last night I was afraid you were going to stay up all night to see Matty," said Solly.

"What would be the use of that?" said the old woman, irritably. "If he came, we wouldn't see him!"

"How do you know?" said Solly, throwing down the broken

comb on the chair. She was thinking more of what she had to do than of what she was saying. She had to go to the well and fill the bucket. She forgot to do it last night. She had to fill the kettles. She had to gather a few twigs to blaze up the fire, and she had to put on the pig's mash to boil on the fire as soon as ever the tea was made.

"If Matty came back, and walked in that door," said the old woman, "you wouldn't have the strength to lift your eyes to look at him. It isn't that the dead can't come back, but that we haven't the strength to face them. We don't want them to come back! That's the truth. It all comes to the same thing in the end! They might as well be gone for ever. When they're gone they have to stay away."

"There's no need to shout, Mother, I'm not deaf," said Solly, and she looked at her mother again, more sharply. "Didn't I tell you not to drag your lips back off your gums like that, Mother? It looks terrible. I don't think you ought to go to Mass. It's quarter past eight o'clock already. You wouldn't be down to the chapel before the middle of Mass. Get back into bed and I'll bring you a nice hot cup of tea."

She went out.

Downstairs there was a sound of sticks breaking and a sound of crockery hitting against crockery and a door opening and shutting. There was a sound of a pail being left down on the floor with a clatter and a sound of water splashing into an empty vessel. Then there was a sound of voices in the yard. Soon Solly came to the foot of the stairs leading up to the loft.

"The kettle is beginning to talk, Mother. The tea will be ready in a minute."

The sound of the cup could be heard wobbling in the saucer as Solly came up to the loft with the tea. The spoon was in the cup, sticking up straight because there was so much sugar in the bottom.

"Here it is, Mother, the way you like it, boiling hot with plenty of sugar, and the top off the milk."

The old woman put out her hand and took the cup. She began to drink.

"Don't get the spoon in your eye, Mother," said Solly looking nervously at the shaking hand.

"Give me the saucer, so," said the old woman, and she

poured a thin stream of the tea into the saucer and held it to her lips, holding it with both hands and tilting it like a shallow goblet. "Who was that I heard talking to you below in the kitchen?" she asked.

"It was Packy Reilly. He stepped across the fields to tell me that he was passing here late last night and the cottage was so bright he looked in the window. There was a fire on the hearth big enough to roast an ox, he said. He thought surely there was something wrong, and he tried the latch but the door was bolted. He looked in the window a second time, but he could see nothing. I said we didn't hear him. At least, I didn't hear him myself. Did you hear anything, Mother?"

The old woman stared into the pool of tea in the bottom of the saucer.

"Did you hear me asking you a question, Mother?"

"Go down and drink your own tea. It will get cold while you're standing there talking."

Solly went over to the door leading down into the kitchen.

"Is there anything wrong with you, Mother?" she said, standing over the ladder-hole and looking back at the old woman. She got no answer.

Solly was no sooner at the foot of the ladder than she came running up it again.

"Mother! Mother! Look what I found in the ashes when I was raking out the ash pit." She held out the steel picture frame. It was blackened and twisted from the heat of the fire. "The wind must have blown it off the table," she said.

"It will shine up again," said the old woman, and she reached out her hand for it.

"But the photo of Matty is burnt out of it!" said Solly.

The old woman took the frame. She stared at it. Solly stared at her. Solly stamped her foot impatiently.

"Mother! How many times will I have to tell you to stop drawing back your lips from your gums like that? If you could only see how awful you look!"

The mask broke up at once, but when Solly went downstairs it formed again over the old face, stretching the skin until every wrinkle was flattened out, and giving the face a distorting appearance of youth, more terrifying than the face of death.

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